Who Posts, Who Shares, Who Tells Your Story:
A content analysis on how the public interacts with sharenting

by

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Abstract

In today's digitised society, people actively share their lives on social media networks, including popular platforms like Instagram. For parents this can include sharing, and sometimes oversharing, about their children. This is called sharenting, and previous research has shown that it can impact privacy, consent, identity formation, physical and digital safety, and even result in identity theft, Deepfakes, and impact parent-child relationships. While research in this area has been increasing since 2016, the literature does not include significant research on how parents are encouraged to share about their children by their social media networks. This led to my research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?* Through a content analysis on two cases, this research is grounded in current literature and communication privacy management theory. The findings inform readers of how social capital and positive reinforcement encourage sharenting, and the conclusion provides research-grounded recommendations for how parents can navigate the tension between protecting their child's digital footprint and the social pressure they are under to participate in sharenting.

Key words: sharenting, child-centred information, communication privacy management theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Every year parents post millions of photos of their children to the internet. These photos range from documenting first steps to tantrums, discovering the world to potty training, playing with friends to paid advertisements, and everything in between. Photos are posted publicly and privately and are forever etched into the expansive memory of the internet, often without a child's consent (Amon et al., 2022).

As a 90's child, my childhood was relatively unscathed by the internet. While I remember the sounds of dial-up and learned to use Google in Grade 8, my parents did not post details about my life online. The early days of my digital footprint included setting up a Facebook account in Grade 10, and I had a sense of control over the information I chose to share. Some things I did not post include images of myself as a naked baby in a bathtub or eating sand on a beach. I didn't share pictures of myself after losing my first tooth or graduating from elementary school. I did not show the world how gangly and lanky I was at 12 years old, and I did not share old pictures of myself in a bathing suit when my body was developing. Why does this matter? I'm guessing that if you were born before approximately 1995, you were also able to decide what was and was not shared on the internet throughout the ups and downs of your childhood.

It is a different story for many children born in the latter half of the 1990's, and it is an especially different story today. Children may have very little control over how their life is depicted online because this control often now rests in the hands of their parents. Social media guidelines often permit posting images of naked babies, regardless of how this could impact the person in the image, or how those images can be reused or misused without the person's consent or control. A parent's job is to protect their children, but many parents are in uncharted territory in the age of the internet. Today, parents are facing questions previous generations never

encountered. Should my baby have an Instagram account? Why isn't parenthood as glamorous in real life as it is on a screen? The ways in which people communicate about parenthood, including performing parenthood, have significant impacts on children. The practice of sharenting, or oversharing about children online, spans communications and technology topics including digital literacy, privacy, laws, and corporate policies. This topic is important because sharenting is entrenched in current popular culture, and yet the impacts are neither well known nor broadly discussed. Society sharents without talking about sharenting, which has the potential to impact countless children and future generations. The objective of my research is to examine sharenting conversations, and to advocate for critical conversations about sharenting so that parents can make informed decisions. After all, sharenting not only impacts children but can also take a toll on parent-child relationships when privacy and boundaries are not upheld (Petronio, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a glimpse into how sharenting takes place online, including its potential impacts; this is followed by a content analysis on how sharenting is viewed by the public. Together, these answer my research question: *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?* The results of the content analysis were compared and contrasted with the literature review to determine the similarities and differences between research and public discourse.

This study will add to the current body of social science literature looking at online behaviours by providing insight into how the public interacts with sharenting. In general, most sharenting research focuses on how parents and children interact with sharenting, the potential impacts of sharenting, and related policies and laws. I have synthesised these into a literature

review, with the intent of using this information to contrast my research with public discourse. My hope is that this will inform readers and researchers of the disparity between current research and reality in this field. In turn, I hope this awareness will one day contribute to transforming practices.

This study examined sharenting from a North American, Caucasian perspective, and did not research intercultural practices or perspectives. Further research is required to study intersectional aspects of sharenting, including background, culture, gender, ages of parents and children, political orientations, urban/rural divides, socioeconomic factors, etc. Additionally, this study focused on how the public interacted with sharenting mothers; however, research needs to be done on how the public interacts with sharenting fathers.

The content analysis examined interactions that already existed within the public domain, providing a naturalistic inquiry into sharenting practices. While I examined two opposing cases to gather insight into this issue, a major limitation of this approach was that I did not ask people questions about sharenting in a survey or interview setting. This helped me avoid the acquiescence bias, which primes respondents to agree with researchers or research questions (Qualtrics, 2020); however, surveys or interviews could have provided other significant insight into these questions. I believe interviewing an intersectional population of sharenting and non-sharenting parents, children, and adults without children would provide in-depth insight and a holistic view of sharenting.

Literature Preview

Starting in 2015, a growing body of research has examined the tension between parents and children when it comes to sharing information online. Research about parents tends to focus

on mothers, aligning with Cino and Vandini's (2020) research which found that managing

children's digital footprints is seen as "new gendered domestic labor *[sic]* for mothers" (p. 183).

Research shows that mothers experience social and familial pressure to share information about

their children on social media, a practice that has been normalised by social media influencers

(Abdin, 2015; Leaver, 2017). Additionally, despite concerns over how sharing can impact

children, mothers feel pressured into sharing (Auxier, Anderson, Perrin & Turner, 2020; Siibak

& Traks, 2019). Research on children focuses on how they feel when their parents share about

them online, with and without their consent (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019). Legal

research addresses ethical concerns around sharenting (Donovan, 2020; Dyer, 2018), and

technology research focuses on how technology intersects with children's wellbeing (Coughlan,

2018; Adjer et al., 2019; Ratner, 2021). Details from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of

Canada were especially interesting in that it emphasised informed and meaningful consent, and

yet there were no guidelines for how information should be shared about children who cannot yet

provide informed consent. Canadians do not have "the right to be forgotten," the right to request

to have their information removed from the internet, a right that Europeans have under the

General Data Protection Regulation (2016). Under current laws, information about Canadians

has an indefinite lifespan on the internet, and we are not provided with guidelines to protect our

eternal online identities. In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles, I included grey literature to

demonstrate how sharenting is a growing concern for the public and is increasingly featured in

news articles.

Methodology Preview

I researched how the public interacts with sharenting by conducting a Case Study. This

consisted of two opposing cases, with a content analysis used as the research method for each

case. The Reddit Case examined how the public reacted to a teenager's questions about what they could do about their mother's sharenting practices. Reddit users responded by supporting the teenager and condemning the mother's actions for oversharing about her child. The Instagram Case focused on how the public interacted with a mother's posts about her children. This mother is an influencer and she received significant positive feedback from the public.

This approach allowed me to answer my research question from two opposing angles, demonstrating the social divide in how the public feels about sharenting. When a child shared their perspective, the child received support; when a mother shared her perspective, the mother received support. From this view, the public's reaction to sharenting is a matter of perspective: agreeing with and supporting the person the public feels they are relating to.

Another approach could have included interviewing members of the public about their perspectives on sharenting; however, I chose to take a content analysis approach because it exposed me to a higher volume of responses and two opposing angles, whereas interviewing participants may have limited the diversity of responses. While interviews could have provided me with more in-depth answers, they would not have provided a broad perspective on sharenting.

Summary

In summary, my research question focused on the impact of sharenting on children and on how the public interacts with sharenting. This contributes to sharenting research since most research focuses on child or parent perspectives and not on how people outside of the family feel about sharenting. This is significant because children are a vulnerable population and if the public is desensitised to how people are portrayed online without being able to provide informed consent, this could indicate that society is overlooking other issues pertaining to privacy, safety,

and consent. Additionally, my research provides insight into how aware the public is about issues pertaining to sharenting.

This research was informed by previous studies and was done using a content analysis method within a case study. I chose to complete a content analysis since it allowed me to look at interactions surrounding sharenting that are already happening in public spaces.

The following capstone project includes a literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion. The literature review covers extensive research on why sharenting occurs, how it impacts parent-child relationships, and the potential dangers it poses to children. The Methodology chapter provides a detailed account of how this research took place. Next is the Findings and Discussion chapter, which describes the results from each case and reflects on how the findings relate to the research question. The Conclusion provides a summary of my research and includes my final thoughts on how the public interacts with sharenting. I also offer my perspective on what parents can do now, with the information provided in this research and other resources, to navigate the complicated landscape of parenting in the internet age.

The literature review provides insight on sharenting, why sharenting happens, and how it can impact children through an exploration of existing research. The literature review includes sections on how parents and children interact with sharenting, digital literacy, privacy and identity concerns, how bad actors on the internet can take advantage of child-centred content, and some of the current domestic and international policies and laws pertaining to child safety online.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

A few years ago, I saw my first birth announcement on Instagram. In addition to the mother's joy and pride in her baby, it detailed the infant's full name and birth date. At first, I didn't think much about the post; however, as I progressed through the MACT program, I started to question the practice of sharing a child's information online, before they are even aware of the internet or can consent to their information being shared. My curiosity on this topic continued to grow during a group project on 'sharenting,' the practice of oversharing children's information on the internet. Soon after, I saw two more birth announcements on Instagram, again including full names and birthdates. A few months later my friend's sister gave birth, then this autumn an old classmate of mine had twins...the pattern continued to repeat. As these children develop, so does the amount of content about them on social media. These parents are intelligent, informed, loving, and caring; yet they are also potentially compromising their children's private information. After sitting with the tension between the parents' desires to share, and the invasion of privacy this could be to their children, I knew I had to dig deeper and investigate. After all, my fiancé and I plan to have children in a few years. If I feel this tension now, how might I experience this social practice one day when I do have a child? This is how I began to investigate the fascinating world of sharenting.

At the time of writing, #child and #children were tagged over 16.8 and 36.4 million times on Instagram respectively, with #kid tagged over 15.8 million times. The ubiquity of child-centred posts demonstrates that sharenting is an emergent social issue that warrants investigation.

Despite increased sharenting research, at the time of writing I was not able to find research on how the public interacts with sharenting. The purpose of my research became two-

fold: provide an in-depth overview of how sharenting impacts children and describe the similarities and discrepancies there are between those impacts and how the public behaves or discusses this issue. This led to my research question: *what are some ways that sharenting impacts children, and how does the public interact with sharenting?* My goal with this research is to determine how aligned public discussions are with sharenting research and to assess how informed the public is on how sharenting can impact children. This could inform public awareness efforts to support informed decision-making in parents when it comes to sharing about their children online. The following literature review is my avenue for exploring this question.

The following chapter provides an overview of scholarly research to date, supplemented with grey literature to demonstrate sharenting experiences. The goal of this chapter is to provide readers with a strong sense of what sharenting is and why sharenting research matters. This chapter begins with an overview of the methodology used to collect articles. This is followed by research on parents' sharenting experiences, parents' digital literacy, children's digital literacy, and children's experiences with sharenting. The next sections describe the potential impacts of sharenting, including privacy and consent, then identity formation. After that there are sections on the risks associated with sharenting such as identity theft and Deepfakes. Finally, the literature review describes current policies and laws regarding sharenting, spanning from Instagram's policies through parent-company Meta to the United Nations Commission on the Rights of Children, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (Congress, US, 1998), the General Data Protection Regulation (2016), and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (2018). After an overview of the policies and laws, I provide a literature review conclusion and summary. This literature review includes a significant body of research, and the

next section on Literature Review Methodology will provide information on how this literature

was collected.

Literature Review Methodology

I began researching sharenting by running searches through Google Scholar and

confirming that sufficient research has been published on my topic. Shortly thereafter, another

MACT student invited me to join her for a session with the MACT Librarian to discuss databases

and search methods available through the University of Alberta. In this session I learned about

leveraging the Boolean search method, which informed my search string composition. Examples

include "Instagram AND (kid* OR child*) AND Influencer*" and "sharenting AND privacy

AND policy." This library session introduced me to the EBSCOHost and ProQuest databases,

which is where I located my first round of papers. I narrowed my results to include journal

articles in English, resulting in 28 journal articles. To organise my findings, I entered

information into a literature review matrix, including categories such as: relevance (ranked from

one to five), theme (i.e., privacy, deepfake, etc.), and key findings.

I used Google Scholar for my second round of searches which helped me locate articles

that were frequently cited by papers in my first round of searches. I conducted searches on

Google to locate relevant but non-academic grey literature, such as the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child. My second round of searches resulted in the addition of

19 more entries into my Literature Review Matrix. The literature review also includes papers and

books I used in previous courses.

In addition to scholarly articles and national and international policies, I collected forum

posts and newspaper articles regarding the sharenting experiences of parents and children. These

examples are woven throughout the literature review and are intended to contextualise different

sharenting subtopics. My objective in including these examples is to remind readers that the challenges and risks associated with sharenting have been and will continue to play out in people's lives, impacting one of our most vulnerable populations: children.

Despite a systematic and inclusive search strategy, publications on this topic were limited, likely as a result of the newness of this topic. Other limitations I encountered include my ability to only explore English literature. Much of the contextual information is borderless, since platforms like Reddit and Instagram cross borders seamlessly. Journal article publications on sharenting emerged around 2015 and have continued to gain traction. The following figure demonstrates the number of papers collected from each year, illustrating the growing research in this area.
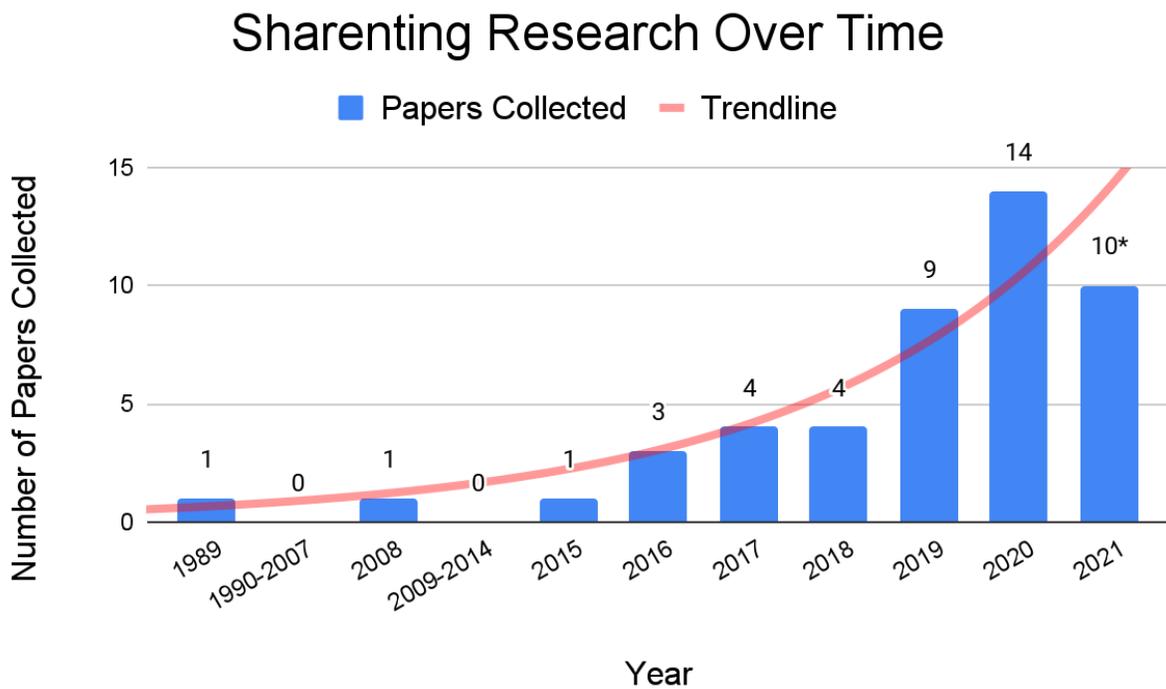
Figure 1: The number of papers collected in my first and second rounds of search, by year, for this literature review; this demonstrates how research in sharenting has grown over the past 7 years. Note 1: The numbers in the table differ from the total papers and contextual examples cited in this paper. Note 2: 2021 included papers published between January and October 2021, and not through November and December. This may account for the discrepancy between the number of papers collected and the trendline.

Literature Review

The following pages explore different facets of sharenting, as supported by previous research. First, I will describe some reasons why parents overshare about their children, which is followed by a section on parents' digital literacy. The second section provides an overview of the literature discussing children's digital literacy and experiences of their parents sharenting. Third, I explore the literature on the potential impacts of sharenting; fourth, I detail some of the risks associated with child-based content on social media; and finally, I describe some of the policies surrounding children's safety online.

Parents

Sharenting as part of parenting. Sharenting is a term used to describe when parents or caregivers overshare personal information about a child online. First associated with social media influencers, this practice has become a social norm taking place among parents (Abdin, 2015). With sharenting framed as "as a necessary culture of care" (Leaver, 2017, p. 2), some parents feel pressure to perform parenthood online to demonstrate their affection and child-care competencies. The more common this practice becomes, the more reinforced it becomes in mainstream society.

Parents share on Instagram for many reasons. Weisgerber and Butler (2016), for example, suggest that online sharing is done as a form of "self-exploration, self-cultivation, and self-care" in the digital world, nourishing individuals offline (p. 1340). Creating an artistic record of parenting and a child's development allows parents to perform a type of online self-care to nurture their identity (Weisgerber and Butler, 2016). For example, parents who post the full names and exact birth dates of their children, down to the minute, may be doing so out of a place

of love and awe that they have brought a new person into the world, and not because they think their baby's private information belongs in the public domain.

Holiday, Norman and Densely (2020) found that how parents present their children online reflects parents' intentional self-presentation (p. 2). This often begins before birth, including pregnancy and ultrasound photos, followed by sharing images of newborns (Abdin, 2015; Leaver, 2017). This practice stems from influencer behaviours (Leaver, 2017). Many children are born with a digital footprint, and some are born with an Instagram account already in place (e.g., @jaydenryanfoley includes four ultrasound images and one in utero video) (Jayden Foley, 2021). An Instagram study on #ultrasound found that 34% of posts included "personally identifiable information" (Leaver & Highfield, 2016, as cited by Leaver, 2017, p. 4). Furthermore, Steinburg (2016) found that "63% of parents reference their child's first name in at least one photo in their stream, 27% of parents reference their child's date of birth, and 19% share both pieces of information" (p. 849). Parents are more likely to sharent if their friends and family share information about their children (Ranzini, Newlands & Lutz, 2020, p. 1). Pregnancy, birth, and parenting are inarguably part of a parent's experience; however, the boundaries are often unclear who owns information, and what information is acceptable and appropriate for parents to share.

A 2020 Pew Research Centre study found that parents share children's information for many reasons including: connecting with friends and family (76%); showcasing a child's accomplishments (36%); social pressure to share about their children (24%); and because other parents share similar content (11%) (Auxier, Anderson, Perrin & Turner, 2020). Other motivations for sharing child-centred information include connecting parents with support systems or supplementing family incomes (Ranzini et al., 2020, p. 1). Auxier et al. (2020) found

that 89% of mothers and 71% of fathers participate in sharenting. Cino and Vandini's (2020) research indicates that curating and managing children's digital footprints is "new gendered domestic labour for mothers" (p. 183). This can perpetuate a sharenting culture through aspirational labour: mothers with design or journalism backgrounds create blogs or social media channels featuring their families, aspiring to generate income through performing motherhood online (Jorge et al., 2021). By framing this through a postfeminist lens and touting social media as an accessible financial opportunity, other mothers are encouraged to follow suit, increasing sharenting behaviours (Jorge et al., 2021). This normalizes sharenting practices on social media, creating an online culture of performing motherhood (Abdin, 2015). Auxier's et al.'s (2020) study found that 24% of parents "feel pressure to only post things that make them look like a good parent" (p. 15).

Parents are trusted to make decisions that will protect their children; however, many may not be aware of the potential implications of oversharing data about their children online. However, there appears to be a disconnect between the concern parents have for their children's digital privacy concerns and sharenting behaviour (Ranzini et al., 2020, p. 1). According to Donovan's (2020) research, parents are sometimes unaware that "they are crafting their children's online footprint and compromising their private identity along with interfering with the child's right to digital self-actualisation" (p. 42). In fact, Auxier et al. (2020) found that "the majority of [American] parents who share photos, videos and information about their children on social media say they rarely or never (83%) worry that in the future their children might be upset about the things they posted about them on social media sites" (p. 16). Donovan (2020) argues that parents are "sacrificing their children's privacy in return for their own positive online connectivity" (p. 42). Blum-Ross & Livingstone (2017) take a balanced approach to this issue,

stating that we "have yet to find an approach to representing relational identities in ways that deal fairly with both parents and their children" (p. 122). Lipu and Siibak (2019) believe that education and raising awareness among parents is imperative to helping parents and children navigate social media together, and that parents need to listen to and respect children's wishes for privacy online (p. 57).

   Parents' Digital Literacy. The literature suggests that parents have a growing awareness of the risks associated with sharenting. Siibak and Traks (2019) found that "young mothers are feeling increasingly uneasy when posting photos of children on social media and... sharenting decisions are not made at all lightly" (p. 117). Anti-sharenting is also a growing trend, occurring when parents cover their child's face with an emoji on Instagram posts (Siibak & Traks, 2019, p. 117). Williams-Ceci et al. (2021) researched methods of informing parents about sharenting risks, finding that parents who summarized a video on associated risks were more careful with their social media posts in the future; however, this did not change parent attitudes about obtaining children's consent before posting online (p. 1). Haley (2020) found that improving parents' knowledge of the risks associated with sharenting was the best path forward, as it protects the child's information and the parent-child relationship (p. 1020). Canadian researcher Dyer (2018) believes that "in order to benefit from the positive aspects of technology, children, along with their parents, need to be aware of the possible risks of social media and how to navigate them" (p. 1). Furthermore, if parents and children agree upon privacy boundaries, children may not need policy protection from potential sharenting damages (Haley, 2020, p. 1020). Most policies rely on parents' digital literacy skills even though digital literacy has not been taught to the generations that are currently parenting.

Children

Digital Literacy in Children. In Canada, each province has a digital literacy component as part of the K-12 public education curriculum (Robertson, 2019), which may prove essential. Dyer (2018) indicates that "teaching technology has become a necessary part of a child's education" (p. 1), and Robertson et al. (2019) found that children who are aware of privacy issues post less information about themselves (p. 242). Steeves (2017) found that Canadian teens intentionally and specifically curate their online presence, concealing their true preferences, hobbies, and families from their social media because that information is "personal" (p. 430). To this effect, Otero (2017) suggests that "children will make up their own identity as they grow and it should therefore be defined by themselves, not by their parents" (p. 412). This makes obtaining a child's consent before posting their information online essential for maintaining positive family relationships.

Children's experiences with sharenting. Children have widely varying experiences of sharenting. When parents share content to archive information, children tend to approve of sharenting more than when it is used for impression management (Verswijvel et al., 2019). Regardless of motive, researchers overwhelmingly agree that parents should obtain consent from their children before posting about them online (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019). However, Lipu and Siibak's (2019) research indicates that parents often disregard their children's wishes when it comes to asking permission before uploading child-centred content to social media accounts (p. 57).

Some children discover the digital footprints parents created for them after they search their names on the internet. While this can be a positive or exciting experience, not all children are comfortable with the publicity (Lorenz, 2019). When fourteen-year-old Sonia Bokhari (2019) discovered content her mother and older sister had posted online about her without her consent,

she described the experience as "mortifying" (para. 6). Reflecting on the experience, Bokhari (2019) wrote, "I didn't have control over it. I was furious; I felt betrayed and lied to" (para. 7). Some children are in direct conflict with their parents about the information parents post about them online. This is illustrated by Left-File-6218's forum post: "I'm 15 years old and... begged my mom to stop sharing photos of mine on the internet, but she doesn't listen...she doesn't take my objection seriously" (2021).

This issue is exacerbated for the children of influencers, whose parents have significant online followings and may financially benefit from posting content about their children. Sometimes parents post inappropriate content about their children online, including Reddit user skylar_sh's experience: "When I was 7, my dad posted a picture of me ON THE TOILET on Facebook and I never let him forget how wrong that was. For some reason, he thinks I'm overreacting" (2019).

While these illustrate extreme instances of sharenting and the vast majority of parents would never behave this way, it's important to recognize that legislation has not yet been passed to protect children from damaging posts made by parents (Donovan, 2020).

Potential Impacts of Sharenting

Privacy and Consent. Privacy and consent are perhaps the two most pressing and universal concerns regarding child-centred content on Instagram. In the context of public domain self-presentation, it is important to first understand how public and private information interact. Petronio's (2010) theoretical framework on communication privacy management (CPM) states that "it is necessary to juxtapose privacy with publicness…both coexist and interact because one defines the parameters of the other" (p. 178). Co-owners of private information must agree on information management (Petronio, 2010, p. 181). With this in mind, it can be surprising that "a

significant number of parents share information and photographs of their children on social

networking sites...often without considering their children's privacy" (Wagner & Gasche, 2019,

as cited by Lipu & Siibak, 2019, p. 58). Leaver defines this as *intimate surveillance*, where

people with good intentions inadvertently violate a child's privacy, and the child has "little or no

agency to resist" (Leaver, 2015a, p. 153, as cited by Leaver, 2017, p. 3). Returning to the

theoretical framework, Petronio (2010) indicates that privacy within families is fundamental for

individuals to have autonomy, while still maintaining connections with the family unit (p. 175).

Cino and Vandini (2020) found that mothers often manage children's digital footprints within the

"digital home" (p. 181), leaving mothers in the challenging position of representing children

online while worrying about hazards associated with sharenting (p. 184). When conflict arises

between what parents posts online and what children are comfortable sharing, this can result in

what Communication Privacy Management theory defines as "boundary turbulence," which

occurs when oversharing information impacts family relationships (Cino and Vandini, 2020;

Lipu and Siibak, 2019; Petronio, 2010). Additionally, the ways children are presented on

Instagram can impact how children see themselves as they form their identities.

  Identity formation. Through the lens of posthumanism, the online world challenges

users to establish boundaries between human and non-human elements in their lives (Mauthner

& Kazimierczak, 2018). Arguably, the exhibition of self differs from the lived experience of self,

creating a human/non-human dichotomy between individuals and their online identities (Hogan,

2010). These human/non-human boundaries are dynamically reproduced, adjusting to different

contexts as they arise in culture and society (Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018, p. 28). This

creates identity issues for adult users, who have agency over the artefacts they share (Hogan,

2010). When it comes to child-centred accounts, this issue is exacerbated by the fact that young

children are not in charge of developing their own online (non-human) identities; instead, they depend on others to "socially construct their identities" and position them in mainstream society (Johnson & Brown, 2015, as cited by Choi & Lewallen, 2018, p. 151). In the context of child accounts, "one of the most visible examples of [influencer] parental mediation occurs when parents do not just post *about* their children, but post *as* their children, using social media accounts in their name" (Abdin, 2015, as cited by Leaver, 2017, p. 7). This makes it difficult to determine the extent to which parents may be shaping their children's' digital identities. According to Choi and Lewallen (2018), "there is a lack of literature on how social media [contributes] to children's representations" (p. 149). Furthermore, it is believed that associating self-worth with approval on social media can negatively impact childhood identity development (Davidson-Wall, 2018, p. 7).

Perhaps most importantly is the ability for teenagers and emerging adults to see how they have been represented online, which can influence their self-concepts and self-worth (Choi & Lewallen, 2018, p. 145). At present, policies do not exist to provide North American children with the right to be forgotten, meaning that identities formed by parents become permanent fixtures that can indefinitely impact young people. Parents have a right to make decisions on behalf of their children; however, only recently have these decisions become immortalized in the public domain, portraying the curated and non-human lives of children.

The previous section has provided insight into the internal dilemmas associated with sharenting. In addition to those challenges, sharenting is associated with a number of potential risks that can impact parents and children in a variety of ways, ranging from misused images to identity theft to DeepFakes.

Risks Associated with Sharenting

Aside from the potential impacts of sharenting described above, child-centred content on social media can seem relatively harmless. However, research has shown that children's images and information can be used in inappropriate or dangerous ways. The following quote from a Reddit thread describes one parent's experience when a bad actor obtained her child's images:

> *When my first was around 16 months I got a message from a guy who [said] 'nice smile on your kid, we love that kind of stuff in my circle, thanks for the content'...I immediately reported everything to the police... After a few months I was contacted by the police as a follow up. The guy was going to jail and his computer was seized for child pornography.* (MsCharliesMom, 2019).

Significant personal information in the public domain can put children's well-being at risk. Publicly available photographs and information are neither under the control of the person posting content nor the subject of the post. In fact, this content can be replicated, modified, and redistributed by both good and bad actors. Unfortunately, there are various ways in which sharenting can damage the wellbeing of both parents and children. This includes identity theft and Deepfakes, which are outlined in the following paragraphs. After exploring those topics, I will outline Instagram's response and actions to the protection of children on their platform.

Identity Theft. Barclays, a British bank, estimates that sharenting will result in over 7.4 million identity fraud cases by 2030, costing around £670 million ($1.148 billion Canadian) (Coughlan, 2018). Coughlan (2018) notes that, by posting about their children on social media, parents often reveal the answers to common security questions, such as a mother's maiden name,

first pet's name, etc. This report indicated that loans and online purchases could be taken out in somebody's name, without that person's approval or even awareness (Coughlan, 2018, para. 5).

Deepfakes. Deepfakes are an emerging concern for child security online. A Deepfake is an artificial intelligence (AI) generated image or video depicting a person in a location, situation, or video that did not take place (Adjer et al., 2019; Ratner, 2021). According to Adjer et al. (2019), 96% of Deepfakes consist of non-consensual pornography (p. 5). People featured in Deepfakes do not consent to being part of them; in fact, they are often unaware of the Deepfake's existence. The following three points demonstrate concerns relating to Deepfakes and child pornography:

1. Deepfake creators require multiple images of the same person and specific AI software to develop pornographic images (Ratner, 2021). In fact, software called DeepNude can digitally undress images of fully clothed women (Ratner, 2021, p. 390).
2. Deepfakes are so realistic that the human eye cannot tell the difference between Deepfakes and real photos (Ratner, 2021, p. 390).
3. An AI-generated program imitating a 10-year-old girl ("Sweetie") was used in 2003 to attract over 20,000 solicitations online, and over 1,000 adults requested to pay "Sweetie" for webcam sex (Ratner, 2021, p. 386). This demonstrates the demand for exploitative child content online.

Deepfakes illustrate how content posted on Instagram is being taken and used for nefarious purposes. In early 2021, a mother used Deepfakes to harass her daughter's cheerleading competitors, using social media accounts to source the images used to create false photos of nudity and substance abuse ("Mother 'used deepfake to frame cheerleading rivals'",

2021, para. 9). To combat Deepfake revenge pornography, Cooper (2016) argued that people

should have the "right to be virtually clothed," which could help mitigate the spreading of non-

consensual images online (p. 818). Despite the risks, there are very few laws protecting

individuals from Deepfakes (Cooper, 2016).

Digital kidnapping is another phenomenon on Instagram that impacts the privacy of

children. It is similar to catfishing, which occurs when someone copies a person's photos and

pretends to be that individual. In digital kidnapping, people copy the images of someone else's

child and pretend that child is their own (Brosch, 2016). This is taken further when these images

are used to encourage baby roleplay (#babyrp, approximately 40,000 tags on June 11, 2021),

adoption roleplay (#adoptionrp, approximately 4,000 tags on June 11, 2021), and other similar

tags (Stanford, 2015, para. 1).

The combination of Instagram's searchability, tagging system and child-centred accounts

make it easy for bad actors to find personal information and images of children. Especially in the

cases of young children, these vulnerable members of society do not have control over the

content others are sharing about them online. With all this taking place over social media

platforms, such as Instagram, one must investigate the role these platforms play when it comes to

child wellbeing.

Instagram's Role in Sharenting

Considering the above issues, it is important to consider Instagram's role and

responsibilities when it comes to child content online. According to their website, Instagram

requires "everyone to be at least 13 [years-old] to use Instagram and... new users...provide their

age when they sign up for an account" (Instagram, 2021a, para. 1). Despite this policy, Instagram

has verified a number of child accounts (Davidson-Wall, 2018). Examples are available at @boomerphelps (575K followers), @taytumandoakley (3M followers), @everleighrose (5M followers), and many others. These children range from approximately three to eight years old. Additionally, Instagram states that accounts must follow their terms of use and community guidelines, which includes a minimum age of 13 to own an Instagram account (Instagram, 2021b); however, this is not the case when account biography sections state that accounts are managed by parents (Instagram, 2021a). Notably, these accounts focus on the images and information of children, with captions often written as if they are from the child's perspective. As noted above, images alone can lead to Deepfakes, while personal information can result in identity fraud. Perhaps most importantly, influencer accounts set standards for normative practices, and these standards are followed by others. It is possible that the managers of high-profile and verified child accounts are savvy enough to use false birthdates and conceal personal information; however, average users do not have the knowledge of professional influencers. This can lead to issues for people following the examples set by influencers, with additional social norms jeopardizing the security of children's data and privacy.

Policies Protecting Children Online and Offline

Policies to protect children's privacy, rights and information on and offline have been developed on both international and national scales. Despite the good intentions of policymakers and governing bodies, children are not protected from sharenting. The following sections outline the United Nations Commission on the Rights of Children (1989); Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (1998); General Data Protection Regulation (2016); and Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada on Meaningful Consent (2018).

United Nations Commission on the Rights of Children. The United Nations

Commission on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) from 1989 outlines principles guiding how

children's privacy should be handled. While this dates back to almost a decade before the

internet became mainstream, it addresses many important issues regarding children's privacy.

The following articles are particularly relevant to children's information online:

Article 12: Every child has the right to express their views on matters that affect them,

and for these views to be taken into consideration.

In 2018 Livingstone pointed out that "all countries apart from the [United States] have

ratified the UNCRC in which Article 12 states that the child has a right to be heard in all matters

affecting them" (p. 21). This is problematic because Meta, the parent company of many social

media platforms, originates in the United States. Bypassing this Article sets a standard for

prioritising other interests over a child's views when it comes to a child's own privacy.

Article 16:

1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her

   privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her

   honour and reputation.

2. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or

   attacks (pp. 4-5).

Article 16 connects with sharenting in that some parents encroach on their children's

privacy when posting on social media.

Article 19:

1. Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational

   measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury

or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including

sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person

who has the care of the child (p. 5).

Article 19 collides with many of the potential negative impacts sharenting can have on children, and parents' digital literacy again comes to the forefront as a major issue that can lead to damage for children.

The UNCRC has withstood the test of time and outlines a child-centric framework against which current practices and policies can be compared.

Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. Online protection policies for children first emerged in 1998 with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) (Congress, US, 1998), based in the United States (Watson, 2020). This act restricts online data collection for children under 13, resulting in the age restrictions social media corporations implement on their platforms for children around the world.

General Data Protection Regulation. In 2016 the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was implemented in the European Union (EU) to protect the privacy of EU citizens (Donovan, 2020, p. 35). GDPR's Recital 38 states that "children merit specific protection with regard to their personal data, as they may be less aware of the risks, consequences and safeguards concerned and their rights in relation to the processing of personal data" (GDPR, 2016, p. 8). The GDPR defers decisions about child information online to parents but does not take parents' digital literacy into account (Donovan, 2020).

In the EU, citizens have the right to be forgotten; however, Haley (2020) sees it as "a last resort for children to eliminate some of the long-term damages that parental oversharing can cause" (p. 1020). Donovan (2020) recommends increasing parents' awareness about the potential

impacts sharenting can have on children and encourages "responsible and safe online posting of data related to...children" (p. 37).

Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. In Canada, we do not have the right to be forgotten or the protection of the GDPR. This makes it even more important for parents and other guardians to have adequate digital literacy skills. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) recommends that individuals grant meaningful consent to the collection and use of their data, with parents overseeing meaningful consent for children under 13 (2018). Meaningful consent includes the following components: easily understood privacy practices; knowing which information is collected, where it will go, and who it will be shared with; why information is collected; and the risks and/or harms associated with consenting to information collection (OPC, 2018, pp. 2-3). Again, the OPC places the responsibility for protecting a child's privacy on parents, who may or may not have adequate digital literacy skills.

Karasavva & Noorbhai (2021) found that changes in public policy result from public reactions to emergent issues, which could be why current legislation has not kept pace with the emerging online landscape (p. 205). When laws develop, Karasavva & Noorbhai (2021) recommends they "balance the competing rights of protecting one's reputation with restricting someone else's rights to freedom of expression" (p. 206). For example, in Australia individuals must grant consent prior to the distribution of their images online as non-consensual distribution is considered unlawful (Karasavva & Noorbhai, 2021, p. 207).

While some policies take children's digital footprints, privacy and protection into account, many struggle to stay up to date and do not take sharenting into account. Furthermore, as Haley (2020) points out, "to eliminate many of the immediate harms associated with sharenting and improve parent-child relationships, parents must be made aware of privacy risks

and seek out ways to protect their children's privacy in the online setting" (p. 1020).

Additionally, Livingstone (2018) found that increasing public awareness could "trigger action by

policymakers" (p. 18). Increasing digital literacy could have a two-pronged effect of both

improving children's experiences of sharenting and adding pressure to governments to

implement legislation.

Conclusion

Overall, the literature describes multiple challenges associated with sharenting, with a

focus on parents and children. Impacts transcend families, leaching into social norms and

expectations (Abdin, 2015; Leaver, 2017). Some parents simultaneously feel pressure and

reluctance to sharent (Auxier, Anderson, Perrin & Turner, 2020; Siibak & Traks, 2019), whereas

others share about their children with abandon. The literature illuminates the importance of

children's consent, risks associated with sharenting, the necessity of digital literacy in parents,

and the importance of policy development (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019). The

majority of research focuses on American mothers (Amon et al., 2022), despite this being a

global issue in which parents of all genders participate. The lack of diversity amongst research

subjects is problematic, and calls for increased intersectionality within the literature. Another

common thread is that not all parents have the digital literacy skills to help their children

navigate social media in a way that protects a child's privacy (CITE), nor are they always aware

of the potential harms associated with their own sharing practices (CITE). This led me to develop

my study around the research question: *what are some ways that sharenting impacts children,*

and how does the public interact with sharenting?

Within my review, some studies stood out as especially relevant to my research. This

includes Petronio's Communication Privacy Management Theory (2010), which investigates

information management within families. Petronio's work informed many other researchers, describing vital concepts like boundary turbulence, and the impact of breaching privacy boundaries within families. Additional relevant studies include, Cino and Vandini (2020) research exploring digital literacy and the tension mothers felt when managing their children's digital footprints, including rules about what extended families can post about children. My study will be informed by previous research on the tension between children and their parents' social media behaviours, including the works of Choi and Lewallen (2018); Davidson-Wall (2018); Lipu and Siiabak (2019); and Verswijvel et al. (2019). A new generation is being born into a social media paradox where parents feel pressure to sharent, while at the same time awareness of Instagram's potential for harm is growing. This marks the relevance of my research question: *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?* Using a content analysis case study approach, I will research this question to reveal how audiences engage with sharenting, including public awareness of current sharenting research.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the literature review was to provide an overview of current research pertaining to sharenting, with the goal of illustrating that despite increased sharenting research, there is more to learn about this emergent field. Key findings included the paradox between pressure for parents to share about their children paired with reluctance to do so (Auxier, Anderson, Perrin & Turner, 2020; Siibak & Traks, 2019). Children have mixed reactions to sharenting (Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019), which could result from their privacy rules, which vary between people (Petronio, 2010). Additionally, children's photos are often posted without their consent (Amon et al., 2022; Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Verswijvel et al., 2019).

Sharenting can impact children's identity formation (Choi & Lewallen, 2018; Davidson-Wall, 2018; Hogan, 2010; Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018), and can make children vulnerable to harm (Coughlan, 2018; Ajder et al., 2019; Ratner, 2021). While laws and policies account for some aspects of keeping children safe online (Donovan, 2020; Dyer, 2018), legislation is lagging behind social practices, which may result from a lack of social discourse (Karasavva & Noorbhai, 2021; Livingstone, 2018).

Despite all this, research on audience engagement with sharenting is very limited. Given the positive reinforcement associated with sharenting (Ong et al., 2022), which is provided by audiences, this is an important factor in sharenting. Additionally, while Karasavva & Noorbhai (2021) and Livingstone (2018) indicated that discourse can lead to legislation, research has not been done on public discourse regarding sharenting. This led to my research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?*

The following Methodology chapter provides details on my approach to answering this question. I used a content analysis approach with two contrasting cases to determine how the public is engaging with sharenting and to assess how much overlap there is between sharenting research and public discourse.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the literature on sharenting, which is the oversharing of child-centred information on social media. Privacy, consent, identity formation, and digital safety are central concerns connected to sharenting. Currently, children are not legally protected from sharenting, nor can their content be deleted.

There are numerous sharenting examples within the public domain, ranging from YouTube to Instagrammers, Facebook groups, TikTok, Snapchat, and other social media platforms. I spent time searching sharenting-related tags including #child, #childmodel, #kidstagram, #childrenofinstagram, etc. Each search provided millions of results, reflecting how frequently sharenting occurs. I also discovered numerous public child accounts managed by parents, including portraying children's perspectives in photo captions. The number of followers on these child accounts ranged from hundreds to millions. High profile child-centred accounts can supplement or even provide full family incomes; however, these children are often unable to provide informed consent for this work because they are too young.

This immersive experience left me with many questions, ranging from the children's wellbeing to the ways the public interacts with these photos. Since research has already begun on the direct impacts upon children, I chose to investigate how the public engages with sharenting. This led to my preliminary research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?*

This chapter outlines my methodology for researching public perceptions of sharenting. It begins by developing the study design, which includes the rationale for choosing a case study

approach and two brief case descriptions. This is followed with a description of the deductive

content analysis used within this case study, including the coding method. The next sections

outline the audience comments, setting, instruments, procedures, and analysis. The final section

contains a brief conclusion on developing these methods.

Design

Interactions on social media provide significant volumes of data, with countless

interactions taking place each day. Defined by Denscombe (2010) as "documentary data" (p.

219), this data is publicly available and provides naturalistic and organically occurring

interactions that are not influenced by researcher questions (Denscombe, 2010). This

combination of factors, in addition to many readily available examples of sharenting, led me to

choose a case study approach for my research. While case studies may not always be

generalizable, they allow researchers to "grapple with relationships and social processes"

(Denscombe, 2010, p. 62). Additionally, case studies provide a suitable method for instances

"where the researcher has little control over events" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 62).

I was very specific and particular when choosing my cases, which aligns with

Denscombe's (2010) recommendation that case studies "should be chosen deliberately on the

basis of specific attributes to be found in the case – attributes that are particularly significant in

terms of the practical problem or theoretical issue that the researcher wants to investigate" (p.

57). The two cases I selected follow a common narrative: public support for sharenting,

regardless of a child's ability to provide consent. This is a practical problem because many

children are exposed or over-exposed through their parents' actions online. Additionally, online

culture supports sharenting, and policy and legal frameworks do not exist to protect this aspect of

childhood. This leaves children to grow up facing the consequences of their parents' online

actions, which have shaped children's digital footprints. The following section describes case studies, provides overviews of the cases, and outlines the type of content analysis used for this study.

Case Study

Using a case study approach allowed me to investigate how the public interacted with sharenting from two different perspectives. Case studies are an effective method for examining subtleties in intricate social situations (Denscombe, 2010, p. 62). By closely examining two cases, I immersed myself within the cases themselves, rather than reviewing multiple interviews or surveys which aligns with my focus on audience interactions. Additionally, as Denscombe (2010) points out, "there may be insights to be gained from looking at the individual case that can have wider implications and, importantly, that would not have come to light through the use of a research strategy that tried to cover a large number of instances" (p. 53).

I chose two cases for this research. The Instagram Case focuses on a mother's Instagram account that frequently features her children. For the sake of maintaining this family's anonymity, I will call the mother "Melissa," the father "Logan," and the children in descending order by age "Alex," "Blake," "Cameron," and "Drew." Melissa's account dates back to December 2011, and she began sharenting in November 2012 by posting an ultrasound image of her eldest child. A month later, her first child, "Alex," was born. Before leaving the hospital, Melissa publicly posted two pictures of Alex. Melissa continues sharenting with very frequent updates about her first child. As her family grows, so does Melissa's sharenting as she creates accounts on behalf of her children.

The Reddit Case examines responses to a fifteen-year-old child's question about how they can navigate their mother's sharenting. I have assigned the pseudonyms "Dylan" to the

child and "Cynthia" to the mother to maintain their anonymity, and will not refer to specific

commenters by name. The Reddit thread in this case began in January 2020 and generated

significant engagement on Reddit. While this case is two years old, the public discourse around

sharenting provides insight into public concerns about child content online, and Reddit

comments apply to countless children. Dylan posted on sub-Reddit *Am I the Asshole (AITA)*,

where people ask for public feedback about who, in a specific situation, is in the wrong.

These selections were informed by Denscombe's (2010) recommendation that case

studies provide examples and attributes relating to a phenomenon. Denscombe (2010) also posits

cases should not be typical and should "contrast with the norm" (p. 57). These examples do not

feature normal childhood experiences because most children are not exposed to millions of

followers. However, while I was investigating options for a child-centred Instagram account I

noticed there are many aspirational child influencers, so these cases should not be interpreted as

an isolated phenomenon.

Case Descriptions

In this case study, I contrasted cases following a common narrative, but from different

perspectives. In the Instagram Case, a mother generates her income from sharing about her

children online; these children can neither consent to nor control this content, and they are not

legally entitled to any of the profits generated by their image or information. In the Reddit Case,

a child has experienced similar circumstances as the children in the first case, but is a few years

older and asks for advice and support for managing their mother's sharenting. The following

information provides additional details about these two cases.

Instagram Case. The first case examines Melissa's Instagram account, where she

frequently features her children. At the time of research, this account had over 13,830 posts and

approximately seven million followers. Melissa and Logan run their own social media accounts as well as family accounts and accounts for each of their children. All of these accounts contribute to the digital footprints of the children. Melissa's content almost always features at least one child, with a range of details about their lives. I chose this parent because her Instagram account is public, she shares about her children, and she is an influencer, which indicates she has social capital and is aware that her content has a large audience and wide reach. Additionally, she posts mostly images instead of videos on her Instagram account. This supported my data collection, which looked at attributes specific to image posts rather than videos. Image posts are static and the people portrayed in images remain constant, allowing me to track how often each child was featured, whereas people and frames change often in videos. Additionally, video posts generate different types of data like "views," which are not tracked for image posts. Overall, narrowing the scope of my research to images and not videos for the Instagram Case supported my data collection.

Reddit Case. The second case analyses Reddit comments on a post written by a fifteen-year-old child, Dylan. This case was selected for two key reasons: first, because it provides a lens into the responses Melissa's children may have to sharenting as they mature; second, because it provides a dialogue between the child and many adults who are concerned about sharenting. To protect Dylan's privacy, I will not share their original post; however, to summarise, Dylan's mother Cynthia generates her income by working as a blogger and influencer. This has included sharing about Dylan's life, without Dylan's permission. After asking Cynthia to change her behaviour, but not seeing any changes, Dylan ordered custom hoodies with slogans such as "I do not consent to be in this photo." This caused disagreements between Dylan and Cynthia, leading Dylan to ask if they were in the wrong on popular subreddit

Am I the Asshole (AITA). Posted on January 29th, 2020, this Reddit post received over 33,600

upvotes and 3,400 comments, demonstrating a strong public response to Dylan's predicament.

Content Analysis Rationale

This case study consists of two cases, with a content analysis on each case. Each case

accounts for the different types of information sharing. According to Denscombe (2010),

"content analysis is at its best when dealing with aspects of communication which tend to be

more straightforward, obvious and simple" (p. 283). This aligned with my studies, since I

examined each case for specific elements, such as audience engagement. Additionally, the data

for this study already existed within the public domain, and the commenters were familiar with

sharenting.

Given the differences between these cases, I used a mixed methods approach to the

content analyses. The Instagram Case provided quantitative data, measuring the frequency of

different types of audience engagement. In the Reddit Case I measured the frequency of

keywords, which led to key themes; I then coded the data according to those key themes, which

led me to discovering other key themes. This led to a combination of quantitative and qualitative

data.

I chose a content analysis approach over a discourse analysis because it better aligned

with the goals of this study. I focused on surface content to find hidden messages in texts,

measured the frequency of different words or symbols, and ultimately quantified elements of the

texts (Denscombe, 2010, p. 280). Additionally, my research centred around words and phrases

rather than longer pieces of text, which aligns with a content analysis approach (Denscombe,

2010, p. 280).

This differed from a discourse analysis approach, which would have better aligned with research on "implied meanings…rather than explicit content" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 287). During the discussion section of this paper, there are observations about "wider social structures and processes" that promote sharenting (Denscombe, 2010, p. 280), but this is based on findings from quantitative data rather than qualitative data. While there are elements of a discourse analysis in the Reddit Case, which examined surface-level comments, overall my research was more aligned with a content analysis.

Connecting Methodology with the Research Question

This design worked well with my research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research*, because these sharenting examples would be hard to reproduce. Additionally, the commenters were already aware of sharenting and interacted authentically with the content, providing me with organically generated data. This aligns with naturalistic inquiry since data was "explored as close to their natural state as possible" (Cutler et al., 2022, p. 3). Studying existing data rather than generating data for the purpose of this study supported a naturalistic approach, allowing me to immerse myself in authentic data (Cutler et al., 2022). Additionally, using a naturalistic inquiry approach reduced the chances that my study would be impacted by the acquiescence bias or social desirability bias, both of which can occur in survey and interview research settings (Fisher, 1993; Qualtrics, 2020). These biases can lead respondents to provide responses that can skew research data because respondents provide answers they think a researcher wants to receive, or answer in ways that reflect well on themselves.

Data Sources

Both cases provided significant volumes of data, so I carefully selected the type and amount of information to focus on. For example, there are many Instagram accounts participating in sharenting, and the one I chose had almost 1,400 posts, around 7 million followers, and thousands of comments and likes per post. I collected data on the first image in Melissa's 50 most recent posts and gathered information on the first ten comments, totalling 500 comments. Additionally, the Reddit Case featured a post that received around 3,400 comments, varying in length and content. I chose the first 50 top-level comments on Reddit to narrow down my data. This allowed me to gather rich data while maintaining manageable quantities of information.

Since this type of data is written, it is considered to be documentary data (Denscombe, 2010). According to Denscombe (2010), documents "post considerably fewer problems than people as a source of data for social researchers" since "vast amounts of information are…available" (p. 220). Documentary data is "open to public scrutiny" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 232), which is interesting because this study observes public interactions, and in some cases scrutiny, of sharenting. Additionally, I selected influencer accounts because influencers are aware of how their information is widely spread online, whereas non-influencers may not be aware of the reach of their content.

The content I analysed exists within the public domain, so I did not need to seek permission from commenters or go through the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board (Varnhagen, 2022, personal correspondence). Like the study by Sowels et al (2018) "usernames…have been omitted from this report to protect [identities] and to maintain the ethical integrity of this study" (p. 7). This protocol is often followed for content analyses on

social media (Derksen, 2017, p. 2). Additionally, documentary research typically has fewer ethical problems (Denscombe, 2010, p. 220).

Setting

The content for this research originated from Reddit and Instagram, and was publicly posted. The Instagram Case was set near Los Angeles, California, in the United States. I was not able to determine Dylan's geographic location or region on Reddit. The specific geographic locations of commenters on these accounts are not easily determined. Comments were in English, and could have originated from many different countries due to social media's borderless nature.

I considered finding information specific to British Columbia or Canada, however, these cases and other sharenting examples reach people around the world and it would not have been possible to locate Canadian comments within these studies.

The setting was conducive for my study because it showed organic, naturalistic interactions with sharenting. Additionally, "qualitative description, informed by naturalistic inquiry, offers researchers an accessible and practical way to answer…research questions" (Cutler et al., 2022, p. 4). On Instagram, people followed, liked, and commented on Melissa's posts as they normally would. On Reddit, individuals commented on Reddit without considering how I might observe them.

Instrument

I used different instruments to gather data for each case, accounting for the different types of data provided in each case (i.e., visual elements, verified commenters, etc. on Instagram and text-rich data on Reddit). As described in the next paragraphs, the instrument for each case

was designed to answer my research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?*

In the Instagram Case, I developed a Google Form to determine how members of the public interacted with Melissa's sharenting; I connected public engagement with my research question during my analysis. The form included questions about the number of comments and likes on each post, a section about the tone of the first ten comments for each post, whether the commenter was verified by Instagram, and if they appeared to participate in sharenting. I used the form to gather information on who appeared in each post: Melissa, Logan, their children, as well as any brands. This provided consistent data collection across each of the posts and connected the instrument to the research question by looking directly at audience engagement.

For the Reddit Case, I observed common concerns about sharenting by searching for keywords, developing key themes, then coding the data. This revealed commenter responses to sharenting, including how aligned comments were with academic sharenting research, and connected directly with the research question. I found this combination of tools to be responsive to my research question since it uncovered themes in how the public interacts with sharenting.

Procedures

I combined Denscombe's (2010) six steps for a content analysis with Thomas's (2003) five steps for an inductive content analysis to develop the following procedures:

1) Choose units of analysis (Denscombe, 2010): In the Instagram Case I measured more quantitative metrics such as likes, comments, and the number of children featured in each post. In the Reddit Case, I selected comments so I could complete a close reading of the texts.

2) Immersion in the data: I immersed myself in Melissa's Instagram page for approximately

   7 hours, closely examining the content, comments, and engagement from each of the 50

   posts. The categories for analysis were preselected for the Instagram Case because the

   content for each post had similar characteristics (likes, positive comments, engagement,

   verified users, etc.). I closely read the texts to create coding categories for the Reddit

   Case, which allowed the categories to emerge from the data (Denscombe, 2010; Thomas,

   2003).

3) Code the data (Denscombe, 2010): For the Instagram Case, I entered information from

   Melissa's 50 most recent posts into a Google Form, which had pre-determined categories.

   For the Reddit Case, I coded the data and reviewed overlapping or uncoded texts

   (Thomas, 2003). According to Thomas (2003), following this process should result in

   three to eight summary categories, revealing themes in the raw data. I continued refining

   my data until each case was within this range.

4) Analyse texts based on unit frequency and information relationships (Denscombe, 2010):

   For the Instagram Case, I created a spreadsheet in Google Sheets to uncover patterns in

   Melissa's posts. In the Reddit Case, I developed a word cloud, word trees, and key

   themes in NVivo. I reflected on the data and made connections between findings,

   including triangulating the data by comparing findings across the two cases (Merrigan et

   al., 2012).

Instagram's format starts with a post consisting of an image and caption followed by comments and replies. Both the post and the comments can be liked by other Instagram users. An example of this structure is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 2: Instagram structure example from Melissa's profile. This post features three children, a caption, likes, and comments.

I evaluated the first 50 posts from Melissa's Instagram account, and the first ten comments of each post. I chose direct interactions with posts, such as comments and likes. Within these posts I included the first image in multi-image posts and I excluded videos. Once I filled out the form for each post, I was able to analyse my data in Google Sheets.

Reddit has a post, comment, response format. Dylan created the original post; first level comments ("comments") respond directly to Dylan, and second level comments ("responses") respond to Reddit comments, but not directly to Dylan. For the purpose of this study, I reviewed interactions directly with Dylan's post ("comments"), as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 3: Reddit structure featuring comments and responses to comments on the Reddit thread started by a fifteen-year-old child about their parent's sharenting.

I included the first 50 comments in the Reddit case study, but not the original post or responses to comments. The original post was excluded to protect Dylan's privacy, and because this research focused on audience responses rather than Dylan's original post. To support user privacy, I redacted usernames (Sowles et al., 2018). The responses were published within the public domain, so I did not seek commenter consent for my analysis (Derksen et al., 2017).

I started by copying the first 50 Reddit comments into NVivo and cleaning the data. This included developing word clouds to determine key words, then developing word trees for the most common keywords. Word cloud and word tree examples can be found in the following

Findings and Discussion chapter. NVivo was designed for analysing qualitative data, and it

proved to be a powerful tool for analysing written texts.

I encountered a few challenges during the coding process. For both cases I adapted my

initial data collection method from using NCapture to using different tools, since I found that

NCapture did not collect the data required for my study. This resulted in developing a Google

Form for the Instagram Case and manually collecting the first 50 Reddit comments.

Additionally, while working on g the Instagram Case, I needed to adjust the Google Form to be

more specific after testing it on a few sample posts. For both cases there was a lack of inter-coder

reliability because I was the only researcher (Denscombe, 2010). Furthermore, while I initially

planned on reviewing the first 10 substantive comments on posts in the Instagram Case, most of

the first comments were emojis and short phrases, and these are the comments most visible to

people on Instagram. To make this study reflect how the public realistically views Melissa's

content, I adapted my methods to account for tone (positive, negative, neutral) instead of

searching for longer phrases.

Analysis

I used an inductive content analysis approach for each data set (Thomas, 2003).

"Inductive coding begins with close readings of text and consideration of the multiple meanings

that are inherent in the text" (Thomas, 2003, p. 4). My first encounter with the Instagram and

Reddit Cases occurred in June 2021, and I spent time with each case before selecting it. This

inductive coding inadvertently started nine months prior to conducting research when I first

began researching. This immersion helped me identify categories, which then "[flowed] from the

data" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279).

Once I finished following the procedures, I analysed my findings. To summarise, the findings from the Instagram case included the amount of likes and comments on each post, the frequency at which each of Melissa's family members were featured in her posts, comment tone, frequency of sharenting amongst commenters, and Instagram verification amongst commenters. Findings for the Reddit Case included a word cloud, keywords and their contexts, and underlying themes embedded within responses to Dylan's original post.

Findings from the Instagram Case were quantitative, whereas some of the findings from the Reddit Case were more qualitative. I defined five key themes from the Reddit Case: 1) judging Cynthia; 2) validating Dylan's experience; 3) showing compassion for Dylan's situation; 4) solutioning, or recommending solutions for Dylan's predicament; and 5) providing social commentary on sharenting.

Validity, Reliability, and Transferability

Validity. Denscombe (2010) indicated that "documentary sources should never be accepted at face value" (p. 221) and provided four key elements of measuring validity in this type of research. These are authenticity, representativeness, meaning, and credibility (Denscombe, 2010, pp. 221-222).

While it is challenging to determine the extent to which online interactions are authentic, the content observed for this study is authentic in that it is the same content visible to the public. This is the case even if there were inauthentic elements in each case, such as commenting "so cute!!" on a photoshopped image, or not using a real name. The Instagram content provides an authentic snapshot of what is visible to other Instagram users looking at Melissa's profile, and even if she has some paid followers or commenters, her profile authentically represents what is

presented to the public. Additionally, Reddit users were not forced to comment on Dylan's post, and yet thousands of people chose to. This indicates that the interactions were genuine, even if some elements could have been inauthentic.

In terms of representativeness, not all sharenting is made equal so it is difficult to determine if a document is "typical of its type" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 222). Even though these cases represent sharenting amongst influencers and their children, any family involved in sharenting may have similar experiences, and other onlookers may have similar reactions. One challenge with this study was that commenters across studies were only represented in one context, and might not consistently support or oppose sharenting across all contexts. For example, Dylan's supporters could participate in sharenting, and Melissa's supporters might not all wish to encourage sharenting when they think about the impacts on children. Commenters likely gravitated toward the content that reflected their beliefs.

When it comes to meaning, the Instagram Case included content that was "left unsaid" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 222), like verified account frequency. There were subtle indicators suggesting that Melissa had social capital without overtly declaring her popularity. In the Reddit Case, commenters provided commentary on sharenting, despite a lack of connections between keywords and "social commentary" as a key theme.

Reliability. Reliability refers to a study's replicability (Merigan et al., 2012), which can be further broken down into measurement stability across multiple measures, and within and across a period of time (Golafshani, 2003, p. 598). The results from Melissa's posts will be stable across time unless she unpins comments or deletes content, both of which could change the findings in future research. Additionally, analysing different posts could also change the results. If the posts remain consistent, the results should also remain consistent.

Dylan's Reddit thread has been locked by moderators and new comments can no longer

be posted due to the age of the original post, which indicates that the first 50 comments will not

change over time. While data like word clouds and key words will likely be reproduced,

researcher interpretation and coding could be different for repeated studies.

Transferability. I addressed transferability by reflecting on Denscombe's (2010)

question, "*to what extent can the findings be transferred to other instances?*" (p. 301). Merigan

et al., (2012) define transferability as "the ability to transfer insights from one study to other

participants, texts, or settings" (p. 93). Denscombe (2010) recommends transferability be used

for small studies because "small data pools cannot statistically be used to generalise information"

(p. 301). This involves reflecting on how results can be transferred to other instances

(Denscombe, 2010, p. 301).

Some aspects of this case study are specific to Melissa, such as the number of followers

and audience engagement she generates. However, the pattern of parents who sharent supporting

other parents who sharent could likely be generalised across other populations. As indicated by

Rheingold and Weeks (2012), norms spread through social networks. Since over seven million

accounts follow her, it's possible that her sharenting choices could have a large social reach,

rippling out from her to her network (Rheingold and Weeks, 2012). This could contribute to

normalising sharenting as part of parenting, transferring these findings across populations.

For the Reddit Case, the similarities between sharenting research described in my

literature review and some of the concerns addressed in comments demonstrate that the public is

concerned about sharenting. Comments on the Reddit Case reflect Petronio's Communication

Privacy Management Theory (2010), which indicates that sharing someone's information can

result in breaching privacy rules, or even boundary turbulence. Given the prevalence of

sharenting, with millions of child-based photos shared on social media every year, it is possible that boundary turbulence will become more common in families with children who have been placed in their parents' social media spotlights. Petronio's theory is from 2010, and did not speak directly to oversharing on social media. Future theoretical frameworks on communications privacy management could expand to account for how social media and the eternal life of information on the internet contribute to privacy rules and boundary turbulence.

While these results can be generalised across some other instances, it is not clear if they apply across languages, cultures, or other intersectional identity factors. Additionally, the cases reveal different ways of interacting with sharenting, and many people may be unaware of or disengaged from sharenting.

Researcher Challenges and Influences:

Challenges. Some challenges throughout the analysis section included remaining in scope with communications theory and research, and reflecting on how intersectional identity factors could change the results of this research. My diverse academic background in linguistics, psychology, and communications made it difficult to narrow down an approach to this research. While I mostly focused on communications and sociology approaches with social network theory and communications privacy management theory, I believe additional scholarly approaches to sharenting research could provide a more holistic view. For example, anthropology could provide a cultural perspective. Personality psychology could investigate the personality traits associated with sharenting and behavioural psychology could provide perspective on feedback loops, learning, and reinforcement. A clinical or developmental psychology approach could speak to the impacts of having a sharenting parent. Additionally, while many factors pertaining to sharenting can be generalised across populations, this study was limited by small scale

research and did not provide an intersectional approach (Gender-based Analysis Plus, 2022).

These are factors I struggled with because I believe a holistic approach would better describe the

multiple layers involved in sharenting.

Influences. My perspective cannot be removed from this research project, which is why I

have included some details about myself (Denscombe, 2010). After all, "no research is ever free

from the influence of those who conduct it" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 301). I am a progressive cis-

gendered female in my twenties. I do not have children. Professionally, I develop policies and

frameworks to support digital literacy and innovation in British Columbia's public post-

secondary system. I believe many issues associated with sharenting stem from misunderstanding

how the internet works, social pressure, and capitalism. I believe sharenting could impact trust in

parent-child relationships. While my dog has an Instagram, I have neither sharented nor been

sharented about. My experiences and values provided the lens through which I conducted this

research (Denscombe, 2010). With this in mind, this research should be interpreted as a version

of the truth (Denscombe, 2010).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used to research public

interactions with sharenting. This started with an introduction to the methodology and my

primary research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with*

sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research? Next, I described how I

conducted my research, including developing a case study, selecting cases, developing a content

analysis and coding method. Both cases outlined extreme sharenting examples, making them

strong case study candidates. The data used in this research existed within the public domain, which suited a content analysis approach.

The next chapter will provide the research findings and a detailed discussion. This will include an overview of the themes from each case, public comments, and a comparison of how sharenting-related concerns are addressed in each case. Additionally, the next chapter will discuss challenges that came up during the analysis and make recommendations on further research on how the public interacts with sharenting.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Introduction

Every year hundreds of thousands of parents post images of their children into the public domain on the internet, often including personal information such as birth dates or full names. This action is called sharenting. Many of these children are too young to provide meaningful or informed consent for how their information is shared, or who can access it. Some families financially profit from their children's images, perpetuating the social phenomenon of sharenting. While research has been done to identify how parents and children feel about sharenting, very little is known yet about how sharenting is viewed by the public. This led to my research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?*

To answer this question I compared two cases: one on Instagram and one on Reddit. The Instagram Case looked at the public's responses to an account that frequently features sharenting behaviours; on Reddit, public comments responding to a child's post about their experience as a subject of sharenting. I conducted a mixed methods content analysis on each case to uncover underlying themes inherent to sharenting. The findings will be presented separately for each case, and they will be compared with each other in the discussion section.

The Instagram content analysis resulted in numerical information that will be presented in charts. Data from this case included how many children were included in each post, public responses to posts, and the social capital generated by these posts (Rheingold & Weeks, 2012). These findings provide quantitative data on sharenting and the response it generates online. For the purposes of maintaining the family's anonymity, I assigned the following pseudonyms to the Instagram family: "Melissa" and "Logan" for the mother and father, and, in descending age,

"Alex," "Blake," "Cameron," and "Drew" for the children. Gender-neutral names were assigned to the children for the purpose of reducing gender stereotypes associated with ideas of who could or could not be subjected to sharenting. Readers are invited to reflect on which genders they assign to these children.

Findings from Reddit are presented in word clouds and word trees. The word clouds indicate word frequency across Reddit comments while the word trees add contextual information to those words. I chose this method because it maintains anonymity for the Reddit users while still providing data on what the public thinks about sharenting. This method is closely tied with my research question since it provides qualitative data in the form of authentic responses to sharenting behaviour, exploring similarities between Reddit comments and sharenting research.

This chapter begins with the findings from each content analysis, and ends with a discussion of the similarities and differences between these cases. Each case is presented separately, beginning with Instagram. The Instagram case includes information about what Melissa shares in images and posts, and quantitative data related to public engagement (i.e., numbers of likes and comments). The Reddit case consists primarily of qualitative data, which is presented in word clouds, word trees, and descriptions. The discussion section highlights the similarities and differences between these two cases, including how social capital perpetuates sharenting. The discussion addresses how this research contributes to the field, additional findings, alternative interpretations. My perspective as a researcher and this study's limitations are also discussed.

Findings

Instagram Data

I gathered data from 50 Instagram posts from an influencer mother, who has been given the pseudonym "Melissa" for the purpose of this study. Influencers are people on social media with large followings, and they are often able to supplement their regular income or make a living off sharing social media content through sponsorships and paid advertisements. The following pseudonyms were provided to the other family members: "Logan" for the father, and from oldest to youngest, "Alex," "Blake," "Cameron," and "Drew" for the children. I conducted a content analysis to assess the type of information Melissa shared on Instagram with her seven million followers, and how her followers interacted with her posts. This includes information about how often Melissa's children were featured, and the amount and type of feedback she received from her followers.

The figure below demonstrates how often each family member is featured in Melissa's posts. It should be noted that Drew, the youngest child, was unborn at the time of this research and was present through appearing in pregnancy images.

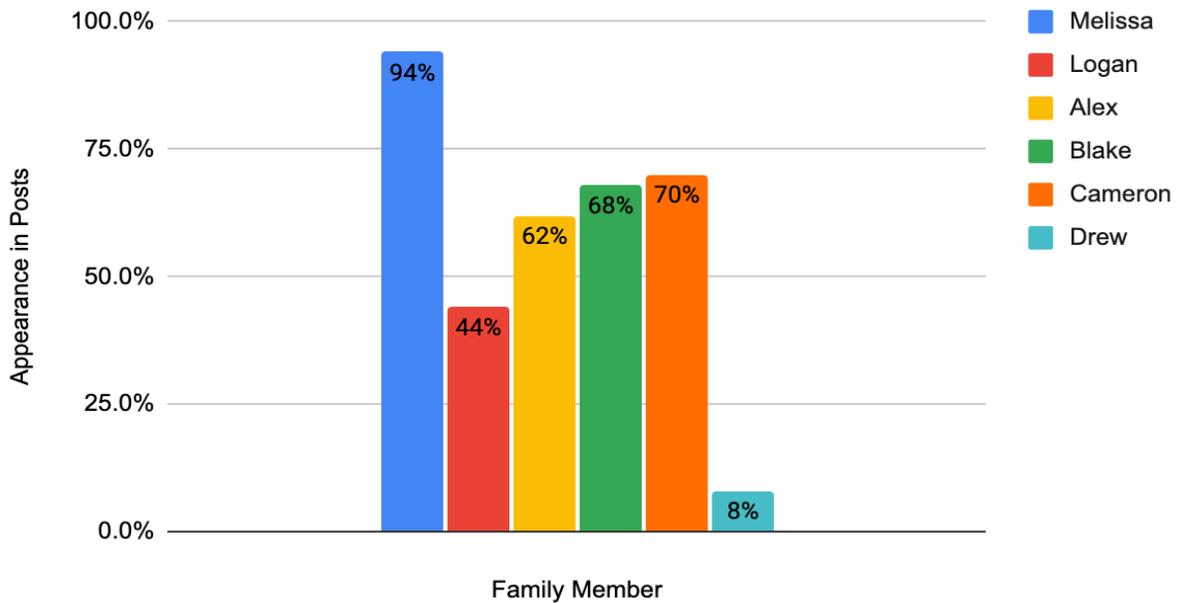## Family Members Featured in Melissa's Instagram Posts

Figure 4: The frequency at which Melissa's family members were featured on Melissa's Instagram account.

Given the frequency at which Melissa's posts included her children, audience engagement is important since it demonstrates the reach of Melissa's content. Melissa has over seven million followers and the 50 posts included in this study generated an average of over 935,000 likes, ranging between 355,000 and over 1.781 million per post. On average, Melissa's posts received 4,050 comments ranging from 693 to over 23,000 per post.

Comments. I reviewed the top ten comments on Melissa's posts to assess public response. Evaluating comments included looking at comment tone, assessing if commenters participated in sharenting, and checking for Instagram verification. Since her posts included her children, I found this method effective for determining public responses to sharenting. Given the frequency of specific commenters (i.e., Logan, Melissa's sister, other influencer families, etc.), I suspect Melissa pinned the first comments on posts to control viewer impressions. This may have skewed the data in terms of measuring engagement; however, it also provided information

on what people viewing Melissa's profile identified as normal. If any of Melissa's followers

reviewed her posts, they would notice that she appears popular amongst people with verified

accounts, potentially spreading a sense of importance or legitimacy.

      Comment Tone. By evaluating comment tone I found that followers generally provided

positive comments, with only a few neutral or negative comments. Many comments consisted of

heart emoji(s) and phrases like "so cute!!". The graph below demonstrates the distribution of

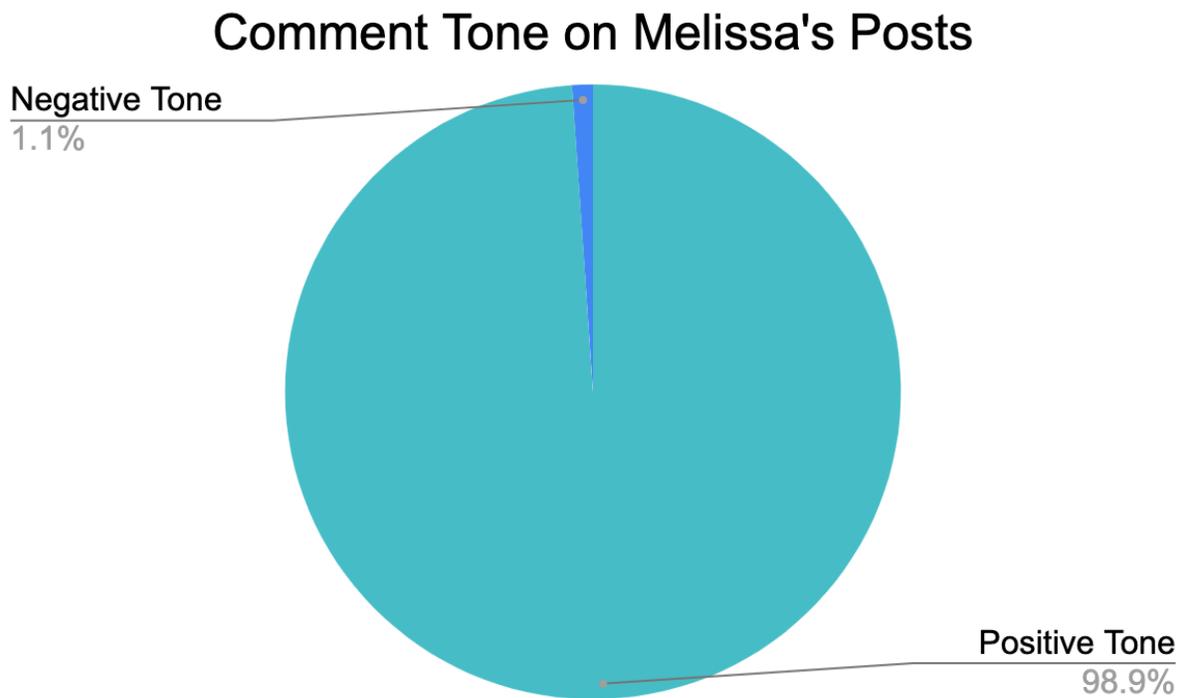comment tone among the first ten comments for each post.

Figure 5: The tone (positive, negative, neutral) of comments on Melissa's posts. These comments were
overwhelmingly (98.9%) positive, indicating that positive comments could have been pinned to the top of Melissa's
posts to show a positive image to the public.

      Sharenting Supporting Sharenting. Additionally, I determined if the commenters

participated in making sharenting posts by hovering my cursor over commenter names, which

made the three most recent posts visible on the commenter's account. The following figure

provides an example of the information that becomes available from hovering over a
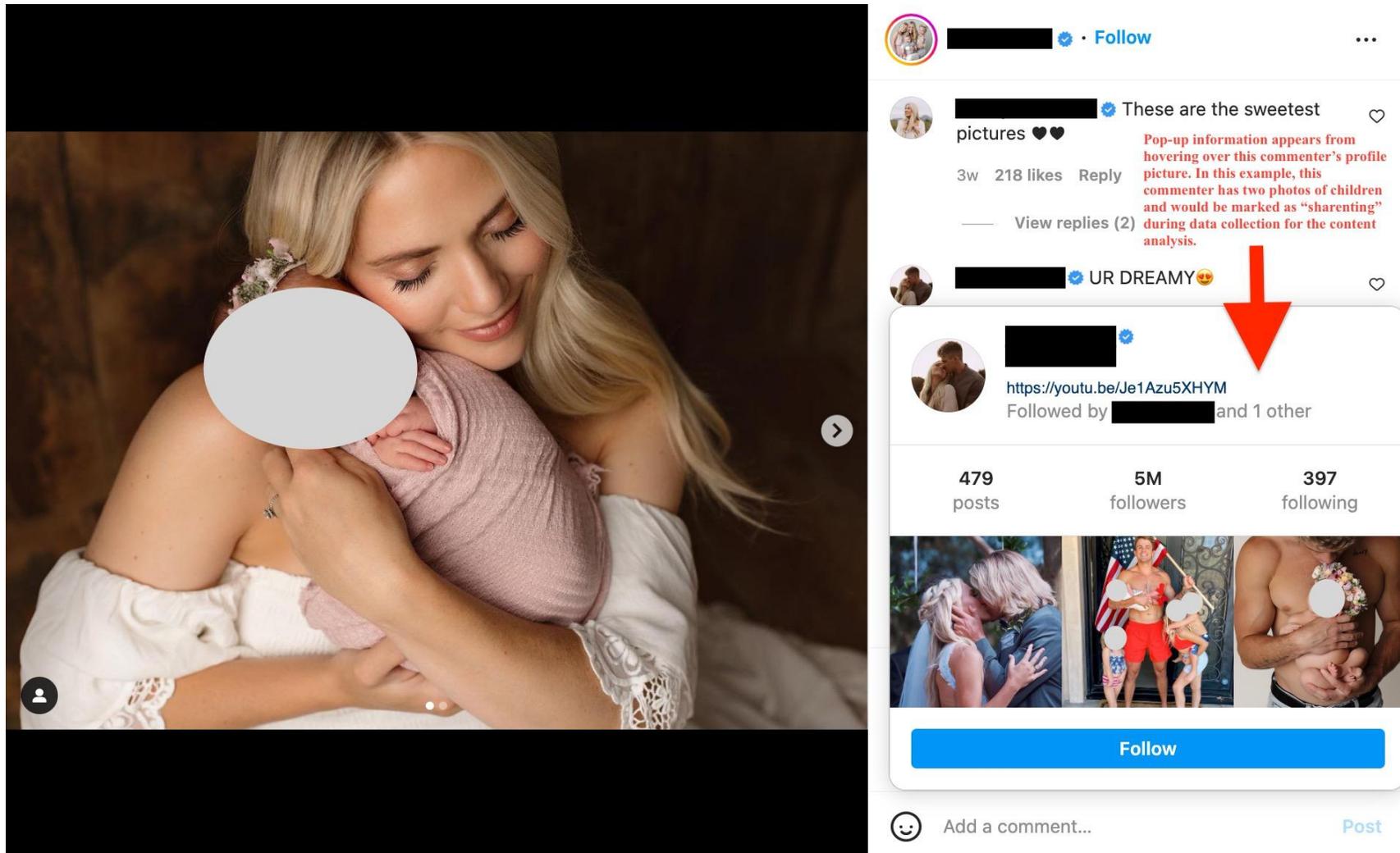
commenter's name.

Figure 6: A demonstration of how commenter profiles pop up on Instagram posts and show the first three pictures of a profile. In this example, Melissa's husband Logan has commented on Melissa's Instagram post. When I hovered over his picture, the three images on the right appeared. In this case, those images indicate that he participates in sharenting because he has his four children with him in the middle image, and he is holding his newborn baby in the image on the right.

When featured pictures contained children, I marked the commenter as a sharpener. These accounts were set to public rather than private, meaning I was able to view their posts without following them. The graph below illustrates sharenting by accounts that authored the first ten comments on Melissa's posts.
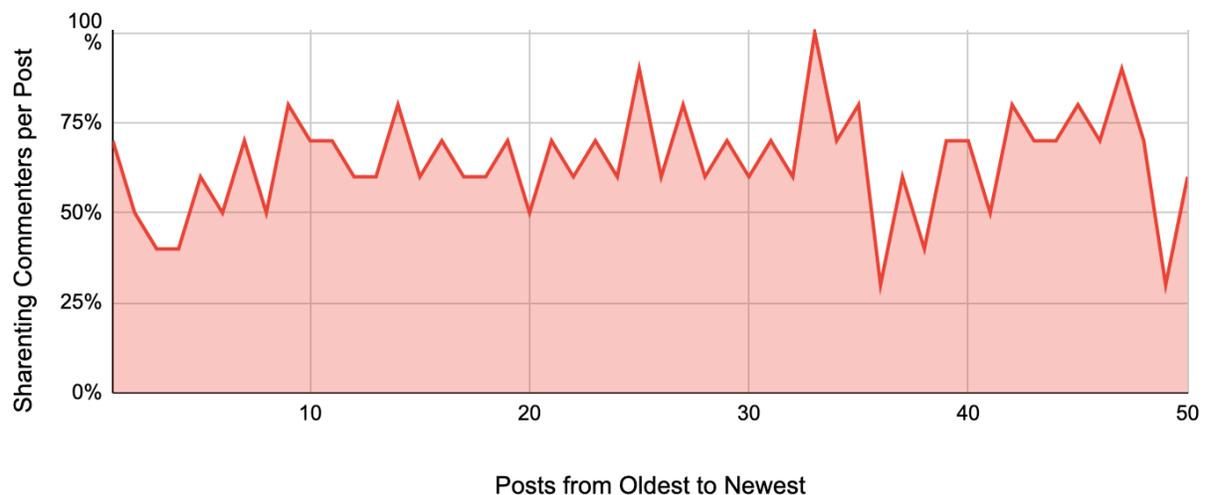

Figure 7: The rate at which Melissa's top commenters partook in sharenting. This was indicated by assessing whether commenters share pictures of children by viewing their three most recent posts, as pictured in Figure 6 (above).

Sharenting Through Fan Accounts. Something I did not anticipate was fan accounts that feature and repost images of Melissa's family. Some fan accounts responded to posts multiple times within the top ten comments, which was interesting considering that Melissa likely pins comments to the top of her comment list. This finding demonstrates that people outside Melissa's family also share content featuring her children, presumably without her children's knowledge or consent.

Instagram Verification. Many commenters were officially verified through Instagram. Social media verification combines status with a corporate confirmation of the account owner's identity. Melissa, Logan, and Alex's accounts are all verified by Instagram. While assessing comments, I noted how many of the top ten comments were from verified accounts. Verified account frequency could amplify Melissa's social capital by indicating that important, Instagram-verified people care about her posts. This is relevant because, as an influencer, Melissa is demonstrating the content, tone, and engagement she believes parent accounts should have. The following chart demonstrates the prevalence of comments from verified accounts within the first ten comments on Melissa's posts.
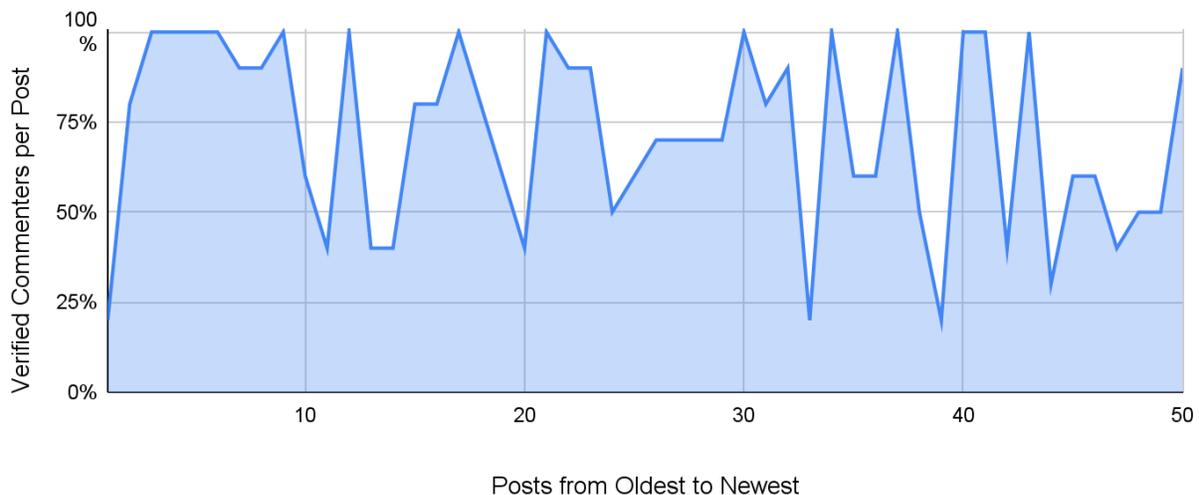
Figure 8: The rates at which commenters on Melissa's first ten listed posts were from verified accounts. Account verification was indicated by a blue symbol beside commenter names, as indicated in Figure 6.

Instagram Data Analysis:

I followed the procedures outlined in the methodology chapter to analyse the Instagram Case data. First, I selected the 50 most recent posts from Melissa's Instagram account. Next, I decided which data to collect, resulting in photo content and audience engagement. Third, I

immersed myself in the data. In addition to taking a deep dive on Melissa's account, I examined

Logan, Alex, Blake, and Cameron's accounts. This included reviewing posts, reflecting on

comments, looking at followers, etc. The next step involved coding the data, which I did by

submitting a Google Form once per post. These forms collected specific, consistent data and

provided quantitative results. This included the number of likes and comments on posts

(including tone), details about the people who commented on Melissa's posts (Instagram

verification, sharenting participation), and details on who was included in Melissa's posts. I

chose these elements because they indicate sharenting (who is in the post), how Melissa's

audience interacted with her content, and some information on who people are in her audience.

Underlying themes included frequently shared images of children, reputation management by

controlling top comments, and building social capital. This case created a snapshot of sharenting

in action and provided insight into part of the public's perspective on sharenting.

Reddit Data

This case focused on an *Am I the Asshole (AITA)* post on Reddit, written by a fifteen-

year-old child in January 2020. *AITA* is a forum on Reddit (also called a subreddit) where people

can ask for input on whether their behaviour or the behaviour of someone else is inappropriate.

For the purposes of this case, I will use the pseudonym "Dylan" for the child, and "Cynthia" for

the mother. Dylan asked for feedback on whether or not it was reasonable for them to refuse to

be in Cynthia's social media images. Dylan's post generated over 33,600 upvotes on Reddit with

3,356 comments. People on Reddit can support posts by providing upvotes, or downvote posts

on comments they think are unimportant or disagree with. I examined the first 50 comments to

reveal common themes for how Reddit users responded to Dylan's post. I used two approaches

for analysing this content. First, I developed keywords by reviewing the most common words

and their contexts, generating a word cloud and word trees for the most common words. Word

clouds illustrate the frequency of different words and word trees provide contextual information

by illustrating what words immediately surround a keyword. Word trees break quotes into

sections, providing Reddit users with some protection of their privacy. Next, I coded text

segments into key themes, providing insight into how commenters responded to Dylan. This data

was collected and coded between April 7th and 24th, 2022.

Keywords. Assessing keywords informed me of commenters' recurring concerns and

sentiments before coding data into categories. The following word cloud illustrates the 15 most

common words in the top 50 Reddit comments:

Figure 9: The 15 most common words in the top 50 AITA Reddit Comments. Conditions for words included a minimum of three characters and included stemmed words (i.e., "photos" and "photo" both mapped to "photos"; "exploit" and "exploiting" both mapped to "exploiting", etc.). To generate this word cloud I excluded words that did not capture commenter sentiments, including words like post, mom, kids, pictures, and photos. A comprehensive list of excluded words can be found in Appendix 1.

This word cloud provides insight into how the authors of the 50 most recent Reddit

comments responded to Dylan's experience of being sharented about. Many of the words are

self-descriptive, such as "parents," "respect," and "online;" however, others require further

context to uncover what Reddit users meant. For example, the word "right" has many definitions

including direction, correctness, and legal rights.

I generated word trees in NVivo to reveal the words before and after each keyword,

which provided context for the keywords without directly quoting full comments. Word trees

alphabetically organise the sentence segments occurring before and after keywords. I chose this

approach to sharing contextual information to support commenter privacy throughout this

analysis. The following figures are organised by word frequency, starting with "right" then

"privacy"; these are followed by word trees for "consent," "exploited/exploiting," then

"influencer." Where appropriate, usernames were redacted to protect commenter privacy.
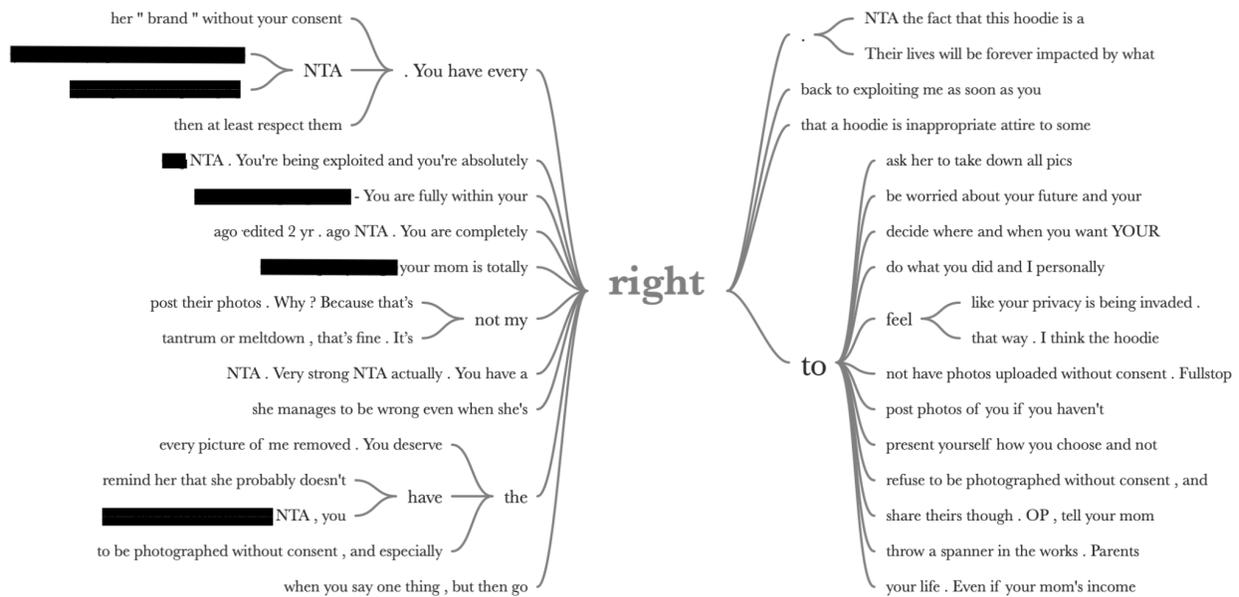
Figure 10: Word tree for "right" that provides seven words before and after each occurrence of "right". Identifying factors such as usernames were redacted to protect commenter privacy. The acronym "NTA," included in this word tree, stands for "not the asshole." This is a judgement mechanism on the "Am I the Asshole" subreddit to let people know if they are behaving like an asshole or not.

Many instances of "right" refer to what Dylan is entitled to as a person, such as "you

have every right…" or "…right to ask her to take down all pics [*sic*]." Other instances refer to

being correct, such as "you're being exploited and you're absolutely right…". Phrases such as

"[Cynthia] manages to be wrong even when she's right…" and "…right to feel like your privacy

is being invaded," demonstrate how Reddit users respond differently to Cynthia and Dylan. The

overall sense from this word tree is that commenters are siding with Dylan.
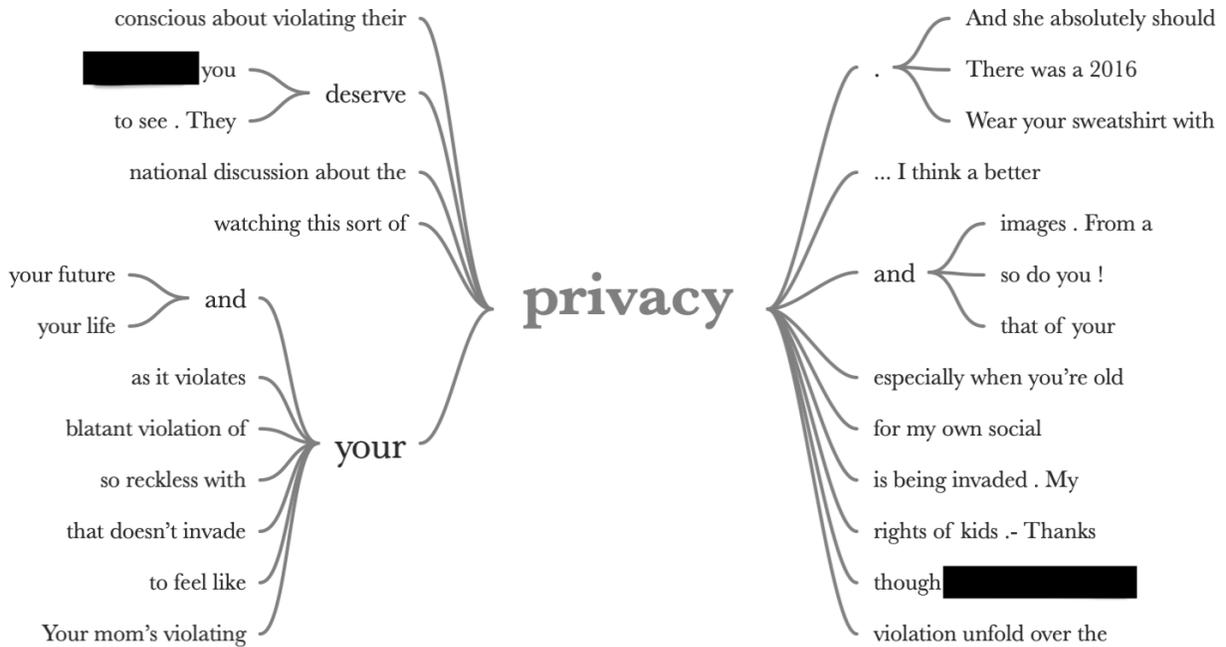

Figure 11: The four words before and after "privacy" in the top 50 words of this Reddit thread.

The word "privacy" is often used after phrases like "violation/violating/violates your

privacy", "reckless with your privacy" and "invade your privacy." Commenters generally

support children's privacy and indicate that a child's privacy can be disrupted by parents.
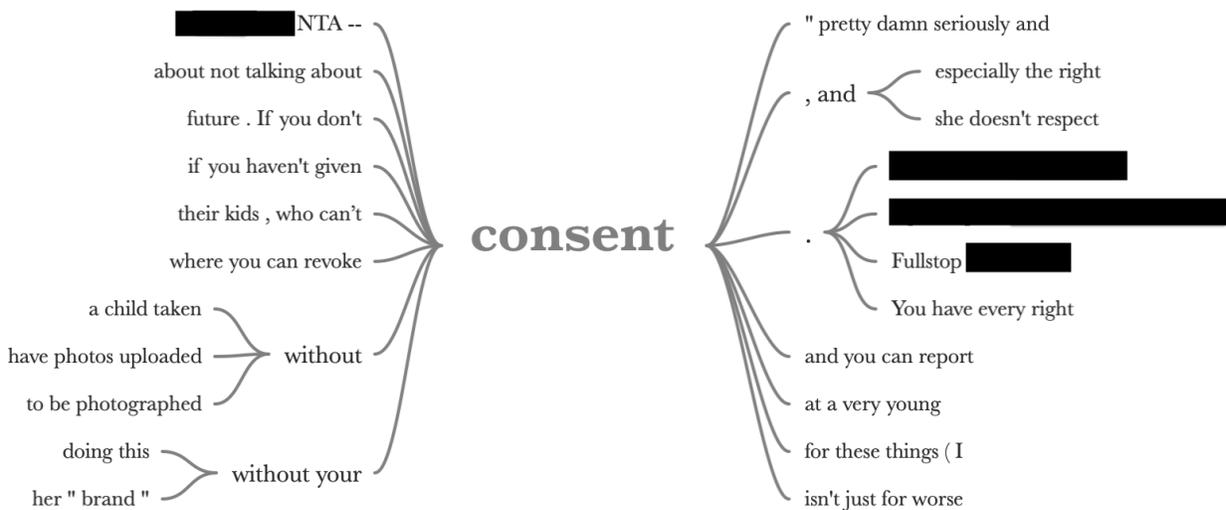
Figure 12: The four words before and after "consent" in the top 50 comments in this Reddit thread.

Many phrases about consent show that commenters are concerned about Dylan's opportunity to provide consent to their mother's sharenting. Examples include "have photos uploaded without consent…" and "doing this without your consent." This indicates Reddit users think children should provide consent before their image is shared. While Cynthia is only mentioned in passing ("her brand without your consent…" and "consent, and she doesn't respect…"), the underlying tone condemns Cynthia's actions.

Figure 13: A word tree for "exploited" in response to Dylan's concerns about sharenting.

a human position , she's ⟶
go right back to ⟶ **exploiting** me as soon as
sorry your mom is ⟶ you and your sister
Tell her if

Figure 14: A word tree for "exploiting" in response to Dylan's concerns about sharenting.

The words about exploitation frame Cynthia as the exploiter ("sorry your mom is exploiting…") with Dylan receiving Cynthia's exploitation ("you're being exploited…"). While at first these may seem like strong words, if Cynthia is financially benefiting from Dylan's image without consent, then it is possible that she is exploiting Dylan and that parent-led child exploitation for content generation is possible. While many parents post about their children without financially benefiting, they could gain social capital, attention, or have their behaviour positively reinforced. It is up to individual parents to reflect on how and why they share about their children.

a line of anti -
a buddy who's
an is the only job
not like being it would look bad
being a blogger , Instagramer **influencer** parents███████
for being a mom tees and hoodies actually .
of influencers trolling their thing but has to
she can continue her type and we have
without using your images

Figure 15: The four words before and after "influencer" in the top 50 comments of this Reddit thread.

Comments about Cynthia's influencer career are less emotionally charged than comments about rights, privacy, consent, and exploitation. While one comment mentions that Cynthia could be an "…influencer without using your images," Reddit users react less vehemently toward Cynthia's career choice than parenting choices.

These word trees provide context to the type of comments Dylan received after asking for advice on handling Cynthia's sharenting. This process helped me parse the data into key themes to reveal underlying messages; this is covered in the following data analysis section.

Data Analysis: Key Themes in the Reddit Case

After developing a deeper understanding of common words and the meanings behind them, I conducted an inductive content analysis to examine the main themes embedded within comments. This inductive content analysis combined Denscombe's (2010) six steps for a content analysis with Thomas's (2003) five steps for an inductive content analysis, outlined in detail in the Methodology chapter. This resulted in five steps for my own inductive content analysis approach, which are described over the next paragraphs.

First, I selected the documents for my content analysis, including the Reddit post. Second, I chose my units of analysis: the top 50 Reddit comments. Third, I immersed myself in the data, allowing categories and themes to emerge organically (Denscombe, 2010; Thomas, 2003). This aligns with naturalistic inquiry because the data was explored in a state that was as natural as possible (Cutler et al., 2022, p. 3) rather than originating from researcher-driven data development such as survey or interview responses. Part of this step included looking closely at the word cloud and word trees generated through NVivo. This inductive process, of allowing the analysis to "work from the particular to the general" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 273), informed my first three key themes. These included compassion for Dylan ("compassion"), judgement toward Cynthia ("judgement"), and social commentary on sharenting in general ("society"). I coded these themes in NVivo, leading me to the fourth step: refining key themes. This analysis phase resulted in two additional themes: providing solutions ("solutionising") and validating Dylan's

experiences ("validation"). This is consistent with Thomas's (2003) recommendation to identify

and work with three to eight categories.

  The fifth and final step involved analysing text based on theme frequency and

information relationships (Denscombe, 2010). This included assessing how often each theme
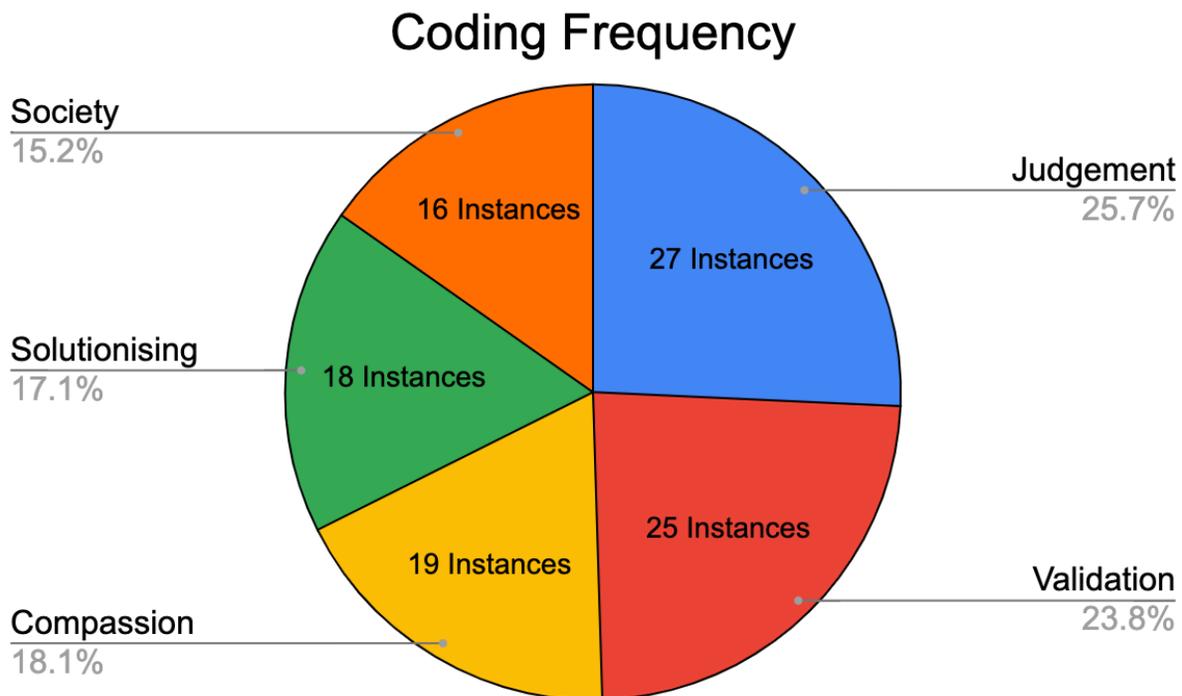
emerged in the data, detailed below:

Coding Frequency

Figure 16: Prevalence of key themes throughout the Reddit Case data set.

  Judgement over Cynthia's actions accounted for over a quarter (27 of 105) of the coded

data, demonstrating a strong negative reaction to Cynthia's sharenting decisions. Approximately

42% (44 of 105, a combination of key themes validation and compassion) comments supported

Dylan. Approximately 17% of coded data tried to provide methods Dylan could use to reduce

Cynthia's sharenting ("solutionising"), and around 15% of coded data provided commentary on

this social phenomenon ("society"). None of these comments supported sharenting, which aligns

with Dylan's initial post regarding the challenges they face as a result of sharenting.

Validity, Reliability, and Transferability

Validity. According to Merigan et al. (2012), "a measuring instrument must measure what it claims to measure" (p. 87). In the Instagram Case, the Google Form was my measurement instrument. Despite not capturing every element of Melissa's posts, the Google Form captures the aspects of audience engagement I intended to study (Merigan et al., 2012). In the Reddit Case, NVivo was my instrument, and it provided objective data on word frequency and word contexts. These objective measurements informed the key themes used during the inductive content analysis.

Reliability. Merigan et al., (2012) define reliability as "consistency of measurement over time, across settings and among participants" (p. 85).

For the Instagram Case I increased reliability for this study by refining and then using the same Google Form to collect data. Developing this tool increased the internal consistency of the Instagram data (Merigan et al., 2012, p. 86), increasing consistency across results. If data was collected on these posts a second time, using the same form, those results should be consistent with my findings. This aligns with Denscombe's (2010) recommendation to create an "audit trail" (p. 300), describing how I collected data for this study. By maintaining a detailed account of "research procedures and decision-making" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 300), I made it possible for other researchers to review my work and evaluate the decisions I made throughout the data collection and analysis.

Regarding the Reddit Case, inductive content analyses may vary across researchers due to intercoder reliability (Merigan et al., 2012). Intercoder reliability did not apply because I was the only researcher for the study, meaning that I could not measure consistency across how data

was interpreted (Merigan et al., 2012, p. 87). My solution was to develop key themes after

determining keywords, which was done by creating a word cloud and immersing myself in data

from the word trees. This allowed me to understand the nuances related to prospective key

themes before selecting the themes I coded. Additionally, I developed an "audit trail"

(Denscombe, 2010, p. 300), enabling other researchers to follow my steps and decisions.

Transferability. Merigan et al., (2012) define transferability as "the ability to transfer

insights from one study to other participants, texts, or settings" (p. 93). Denscombe (2010)

recommends transferability be used for small studies because "small data pools cannot

statistically be used to generalise information" (p. 301). This involves reflecting on how results

can be transferred to other instances (Denscombe, 2010, p. 301).

Some aspects of this case study are specific to Melissa, such as the number of followers

and audience engagement she generates. However, the pattern of sharenting parents supporting

other sharenting parents could likely be generalised across other populations. As indicated by

Rheingold and Weeks (2012), norms spread through social networks. Since over seven million

accounts follow her, it's possible that her sharenting choices could have a large social reach,

rippling out from her to her network (Rheingold and Weeks, 2012). Similar to Abdin's (2015)

and Leaver's (2017) research, this could contribute to normalising sharenting as part of

parenting, transferring these findings across populations.

Parts of the Reddit case study are specific to the population that responded to Dylan.

However, given the similarities between sharenting research and some of the concerns addressed

in comments, it is likely that other members of the public share common concerns, and similar

responses could be found from people outside of this case.

Now that the findings from each case have been provided and described, they will be assessed for how they contribute to the field, how they align with the research question, additional findings, and alternative interpretations. Additionally, I will describe my lens for interpreting this study. Finally, I will provide some of the study's limitations.

Discussion

The Instagram and Reddit Cases provide insight into how the public interacts with sharenting in extreme cases. Both cases focus on the high-profile sharenting done by influencers rather than casual sharenting done by parents who are not financially profiting from social media. However, the ways in which influencers sharent impact not only their own children but also public perceptions of how parents should represent their children online (Abdin, 2015; Leaver, 2017). While these cases do not represent the average experience of parents and children, the Instagram Case demonstrates how sharenting is spread and normalised, and the Reddit Case provides an example of the tension between children and parents regarding online sharing practices. Lessons from these cases can still be extrapolated, and there are many parallels between influencer and non-influencer sharenting practices. Furthermore, regardless of whether a parent is an influencer, all children can be subjected to sharenting. With these cases taken together, we can learn about the spread and popularisation of sharenting, as well as the potential impacts sharenting can have on families.

Reflecting on the research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?*, this case study provides two key results.

The Instagram Case demonstrates that professional sharenters receive a lot of encouragement. The public response to Melissa's sharenting was overwhelmingly positive and

concerns about her behaviour could have either been deleted or buried under countless positive responses. Additionally, people who do not want to see Melissa's content do not follow her, likely reducing the amount of neutral or negative feedback she receives. This perpetuates a positive view of sharenting, which, when seen by other sharenters, may contribute to a positive feedback loop. Melissa's account almost glorifies sharenting since she has over seven million followers; her posts portray performative parenting, and she is visibly supported by other people with verified accounts. This case shows how influencers impact digital social norms (Abdin, 2015; Leaver, 2017; Rheingold & Weeks, 2012) with many top comments on Melissa's posts being made by other sharenters, perpetuating a normalised view of sharenting.

The Reddit Case shows that many members of the public are against sharenting, especially when provided with the child's perspective. This is reflected in the Reddit comments, such as Dylan having the "…right to not have photos uploaded without consent." The overwhelming response was support for Dylan and condemnation of the way Cynthia handled the situation. Reddit users responded to Dylan by bringing up a range of topics, many of which corresponded to current sharenting research. This included feedback about Dylan's rights, privacy, consent, and digital footprint. Further, Reddit users viewed Dylan's mother's behaviour as exploitative since she socially and financially profited from Dylan's image.

Melissa's popularity on Instagram as a professional sharenter speaks to something more in our society. Melissa's glossy, edited images portray a polished and idealised version of motherhood with smiling children in matching clothes, and she often describes how much she loves being a mother. To tired mothers with screaming toddlers Melissa's image could provide an aspirational state of motherhood. The millions of followers and thousands of likes and comments Melissa receives through Instagram could show a sense of community for other

women who have chosen to focus on motherhood rather than their careers. This is relatively

deceptive given that Melissa's career is to be an influencer; however, it could help mothers feel

seen and heard, an experience they may not see in mainstream media. From this perspective,

sharenting may validate mothers' experiences and provide them with community, while ignoring

the potential implications this could have on their children.

The Reddit Case intersects with sharenting research, with commenters addressing the

impact of sharenting on children, including safety, autonomy, and familial relationships. This

was evident in the frequent words used by Reddit users, such as "rights," "violation," and

"consent." Additionally, Reddit users tended to provide Dylan with support, advocating for

Dylan's privacy and autonomy. Comments on Reddit recommended "stone-walling" Cynthia,

meaning that Dylan would stop sharing personal information. This aligns with Petronio's

Communication Privacy Management Theory (2010), which considers shared information to be

co-owned by two family members. In co-ownership, Petronio (2010) states that "there is an

expectation of members protecting the dissemination to individuals within and outside of the

family boundary" (p. 177). Breaching privacy rules can result in boundary turbulence or privacy

breakdown (p. 178). In this sense, digital footprints that are co-owned by a parent and child can

undergo boundary turbulence when a child's privacy rules are not met (Petronio, 2010).

Boundary turbulence refers to issues that arise when information about one member of a family

is shared without the permission of another (Petronio, 2010). Privacy boundaries and privacy

rules vary across people, so parents should use caution when assuming what their children will

be comfortable sharing (Petronio, 2010). Given Dylan's mother's profession, information about

Dylan has been shared without consent, reducing Dylan's trust and willingness to share in the

future (Petronio, 2010). Unresolved boundary turbulence and violations can result in complicated and fraught family relationships (Petronio, 2010).

That said, for Cynthia sharenting provided for her children, including through opportunities that may not have otherwise been available. Comments directed at Cynthia were negative, often condemning her actions. This includes judging her parenting abilities ("I'm sorry you have this situation for a mother") and career path ("this is the type of behaviour I'd expect from an influencer;" "get another job / a real job"). When Reddit users addressed their own experiences, they were consistent with the division of providing positive feedback for children and negative feedback for parents.

The condemnation of Cynthia was interesting because it showed that Reddit users did not consider the challenges associated with sharenting from parents' perspectives. Realistically, financial stability requires having a job, which in Cynthia's case involved sharing content. While this is not a typical career pathway for many people, being an influencer is a new and growing profession. Additionally, Cynthia may not have other clear work pathways and, like other parents, is probably doing the best she can with the resources available. This does not minimise Dylan's challenges, but it does shed light on how complicated the situation is.

Overall, these two cases illustrate some of the many ways the public interacts with sharenting. Children received compassion, especially among people who were aware of the potential impacts of sharenting. This group tended to condemn sharenting, whereas parenting communities that did not overtly demonstrate knowledge on sharenting provided positive feedback to sharenting parents. There is very little research on how the public discusses or interacts with sharenting; however, these findings relate to the literature in that parents experience sharenting pressures (Auxier, Anderson, Perrin & Turner, 2020; Siibak & Traks,

2019) despite sharenting not being in children's best interests (Ajder et al., 2019; Amon et al., 2022; Choi & Lewallen, 2018; Coughlan, 2018; Davidson-Wall, 2018; Lipu & Siibak, 2019; Ratner, 2021; Verswijvel et al., 2019). Melissa and Cynthia may have contributed to the sharenting pressure they experience through their work as influencers, and it is unclear if they are aware of the impact sharenting can have on their children. These cases represent a small sample of how people discuss sharenting on Instagram and Reddit; however, discussions will vary across communities and platforms.

The Instagram Case had a positive reception, which may in part be due to the passive nature of interactions on Instagram. Double-tapping an image on a mobile device is all it takes to quickly view and "like" an image. This could have skewed Instagram responses to be more positive than they would be if the audience was asked to actively engage in a sharenting discussion.

The Reddit Case provided a critical response to sharenting, which may stem from responding to a child's experience, or could result from the format of Reddit's interactions. In this study the Reddit comments were longer than the Instagram comments and likely required more thought. Dylan asked for advice, so responses likely included some critical thought and reflection.

While these findings may appear simple at first, the intertwined nature of identities is complicated because information ownership within families is nuanced, and social media interactions vary across platforms. A mother's parenting experience is her own, but she is parenting an individual who will grow into an autonomous adult and who should be able to make decisions about their own online identity. There is no perfect solution and parents are legally

entitled to share content about their children online. From social and legal perspectives in Canada and abroad, this is an unresolved phenomenon.

Insights in Relation to the Field

There are a variety of insights gained from this study in relation to the field overall. My first observation is that not all parents are familiar with the potential implications of sharenting, which means they may not be able to provide informed consent for their children. This can be attributed to cultural values, power dynamics, digital literacy, social pressure, conforming to a set of social norms, or other causes.

Increasing digital literacy could support informed decision-making, allowing parents to mindfully share about their children. While content may appear harmless in the moment, as children gain autonomy and become adults, old content can become damaging or embarrassing, potentially causing rifts in otherwise healthy relationships. This does not mean that parents should not share about their children or their experiences, but instead encourages parents to find safe and secure ways to share about children. This could include using platforms that limit the spread of children's photos and sharing digital albums with specific, known friends and family rather than the internet at large.

At present, managing digital footprints is often "new gendered domestic labor *[sic]* for mothers" (Cino and Vandini, 2020, p. 183). In addition to increasing digital literacy, balancing and ungendering digital reputation management between all parents could enhance and improve sharenting conversations. Information is a prerequisite for informed decision-making, and increased knowledge about safely sharing about children online will support making the right decision in each family.

Beyond parents, sharenting is a social and cultural phenomenon. Pressure on parents can increase sharenting, regardless of whether parents are comfortable with this (Cino & Vandini, 2020; Verswijvel et al., 2019). Changing sharenting will involve changing social norms and practices, and this involves having the language to talk about sharenting and space for dialogue.

Additional Findings

An unexpected finding from this research was that the word "sharent" was not used in the Reddit Case. While this may not yet be a mainstream term, its absence indicates that while people may have thoughts about sharenting, they may be struggling to put it into words since an alternative word was not used either. If an audience does not have the vocabulary to describe a social phenomenon, discussions become more difficult amongst all audiences.

In addition to these findings, this research uncovered the role social capital has in sharenting. For example, Melissa's top comments often consisted of verified accounts and fan accounts, both of which demonstrate social importance among influencers. When I scrolled down to investigate other follower comments, I found that very few comments after the first 10-15 were from verified accounts or fan pages. This indicates the top comments on Melissa's posts could be curated to fit her image.

Alternative Interpretations

Addressing alternative interpretations is part of Denscombe's (2010) recommendation to review rival explanations (p. 303). The following points cover my thoughts on alternative explanations; however, Merrigan et al. (2012) states that "your knowledge is your way of making sense of the world" (p. 35), indicating that this scope is limited to my own interpretations.

The Instagram Case focused on a passive audience, where a double-tap on an image or a two-emoji comment could result in appearing "pro-sharent". Additionally, social media engagement can be purchased, making the authenticity of Melissa's follower count, comments, and likes potentially inaccurate. While I am unsure whether Melissa purchases Instagram engagement, with over seven million followers, it is a possibility. Overall, public engagement in the Instagram Case was shallow, took little time, and involved minimal thoughtfulness.

The Reddit Case indicated a more engaged and active audience. While some Reddit users simply upvoted or read the original post, others engaged with the content by providing thoughtful responses.

Overall, Instagram users supported Melissa and Reddit users supported Dylan, which could be a result of the conformity bias (Padalia, 2014). This bias is the "tendency to go along with group norms or follow them passively" (Padalia, 2014, p. 223). The social division on sharenting could have more to do with the poster and other members of the audience than what a person would support in other contexts. In this case, a cultural shift for having open and informed conversations about sharenting could provide a solution by allowing people to explore this topic in different contexts.

Positive reinforcement could encourage sharenting behaviours as parents become familiar with getting attention for sharing about their children online (Ong et al., 2022). This perception of social approval encourages parents to continue sharing about their children. Further, other parents or new parents see that sharenting can build social capital, which could encourage them to sharent, thus perpetuating the cycle (Rheingold & Weeks, 2012). Additionally, parents with children old enough to consent to sharenting, but who inconsistently seek children's permission,

are demonstrating cognitive dissonance, illustrated by the gap between their actions and beliefs (Amon et al., 2022).

Researcher Perspective

When it comes to sharenting, I have an outsider's perspective. As expressed in the Introduction, I was able to develop my own online identity and was not sharented about. One day I may have children and it is my intention to make informed decisions about their digital footprints; however, this day has yet to come and I do not have first-hand experience with the social pressure to sharent.

Overall, my outsider's perspective of sharenting allowed me to be curious without taking the research personally or feeling guilty or defensive of my previous actions, which could have occurred if I was a sharenting parent. This curiosity let me explore sharenting without being afraid of what I would find.

One of the drawbacks of my perspective was that I am not able to fully empathise with the challenges or tension attached to sharenting. While I tried to maintain a balanced perspective, there were times where I may have been judgemental or where I may have underestimated the pressure there is on parents.

Additionally, I examined other materials pertaining to the family featured in the Instagram Case, which may have impacted my perception of the overall content. This included mapping out social relations, reading about the family, closely examining related Instagram accounts, and uncovering that Melissa has extensive hair extensions, bleaches the hair of at least one of her children, and uses Photoshop on herself and her children before posting pictures. Learning about the inauthentic portrayal of her and her family life allowed me to see the inauthenticity behind her blonde, thin, religious, patriotic, parent-first persona. I tried not to

allow this to skew my data; however, learning that her image was contrived made it difficult to take her account at face value, which is what I tried to do to gather the perspective of her followers.

Limitations

While this study provided naturally occurring data through examining existing examples of sharenting on Reddit and Instagram, there was not an opportunity to inquire further about the complicated reactions people have to sharenting. For example, it would have been interesting to ask sharenting supporters about the concerns they may have about sharenting practices, and sharenting condemners about the possible benefits of sharenting. This study provided a relatively polarised depiction of sharenting, yet research shows the situation is more nuanced. This study did not provide space to address these nuances, limiting the scope of the findings.

Another limitation was that this study looked at the sharenting perspectives provided on Reddit and Instagram; however, sharenting occurs across social media and the public may interact differently with it depending on the platform and type of media. For example, sharenting on Facebook, YouTube or TikTok could result in different responses because they have different audiences. Additionally, video content and image content could produce different reactions to sharenting.

This study examined sharenting from a North American, Caucasian perspective, and did not include intercultural practices or perspectives. Using a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) model for assessing intersectional factors in sharenters, children, and audiences such as language, ethnicity/race, religion, age, level of ability, gender, geography, culture, income, sexual orientation, education, and sex could provide a more in-depth analysis of how the public interacts with sharenting based on intersectional identity factors (Gender-based Analysis Plus,

2022). This study did not measure or account for identity factors, which likely impact how sharenting occurs and is perceived across populations.

Chapter Summary

Overall, this case study provided two public perspectives on sharenting, with some people supporting the practice and others opposing it. My interpretation is that people may not have the words to identify sharenting, creating a barrier to opening dialogues for legal and social change. While the impacts of sharenting are known by some groups, people who support sharenting could perpetuate digital and physical harm to children.

These findings may be the result of many identity or contextual factors, and could be influenced by human biases. Identity factors could include digital literacy, age, gender identity, education, socioeconomic status, culture, race/ethnicity, etc. Contextual factors and biases for responses to sharenting could include the type of engagement present on each platform, the conformity bias (Padalia, 2014), positive reinforcement conditioning people to approve of sharenting (Ong et al., 2022), and cognitive dissonance with a person knowing the harms of sharenting but doing it anyway.

This is significant to the field because sharenting will continue regardless of research unless its impacts are brought directly to public attention. Additionally, audiences have been left out of most sharenting research. Understanding how audiences interact with sharenting can inform future researchers how child-centred content is perceived online, and audience dialogues can slowly change to shift culture. Future research in this field could approach similar research questions using different methodologies, such as interviews, surveys, discourse analysis, or grounded theory (Denscombe, 2010).

In this study, conformity bias may have led to support for Melissa and for Dylan, two opposing positions in sharenting; however, conformity bias could be leveraged to build awareness and encourage conversations about sharenting. This will only be possible with increased digital literacy and open dialogues. This aligns with Karasavva & Noorbhai's (2021) assessment that changes in public policy result from public reactions to emergent issues. According to Karasavva & Noorbhai (2021), this may be why legislation is lagging behind social change: the dialogue is not yet present to encourage cultural shifts in online spaces. This is supported by Livingstone (2018), who found that increasing public awareness can result in policy actions. Furthermore, Haley (2020) found that parent-child relationships can be improved when parents are aware of the potential risks inherent to sharenting.

The next and final section of this paper provides a conclusion to my research. In addition to summarising and contextualising my findings, I provide recommendations on navigating this complicated landscape. The tension between sharenting research and common sharenting practices can leave many people torn over how they should share about their child on social media. Online culture is important, and people spend a lot of time online. It would be unrealistic to expect parents to be silent about their experiences, but this needs to be balanced with children's need for privacy. The conclusion will finish with comments on directions for future research and some last words on my research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

Sharenting is a new field, with research emerging around seven years ago in 2015. Since then, scholarly research has increased significantly. Throughout my research on sharenting, which began in early 2021, I learned a lot about how parents and children interact with sharenting, its potential risks, and I have read corporate, domestic, and international policies on protecting children online. After reading extensive journal articles and grey literature, I have yet to find research on how audiences engage with sharenting. Audiences provide parents with positive reinforcement for sharenting, which is an essential factor in this practice. My research sought to begin audience research by contrasting commenters in two case studies featuring sharenting. This led to my research question: *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?* Audience engagement can encourage or discourage online behaviours; united and informed, people have the power to change online cultures.

The following paragraphs provide a conclusion to this research, starting with a summary of my findings, how these findings fit into the context of other sharenting research, recommendations to parents, recommendations for future research, and a summary.

Summary of the Findings

The key findings from this study include mixed public responses to sharenting, ranging from support on Melissa's Instagram account to opposition on Reddit. Each case provided a different perspective, and possibly due to the conformity bias (Padalia, 2014), audiences may

have aligned with the audience perspective they were engaging with. Public engagement on sharenting may vary across platforms based on how platforms are used. Instagram is image-based, and liking an image does not need to align with agreeing with everything an image stands for. Additionally, while audiences in this study did not specifically mention the word "sharenting," Reddit comments aligned with key themes found in sharenting research such as concern for children's privacy, consent, rights, and digital footprints. Influencers can normalise social practices and encourage other parents to participate in sharenting (Abdin, 2015; Leaver, 2017).

This relates to the research question, *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?* by demonstrating a variety of ways the public engages with sharenting. Additionally, my findings indicate that the public's concerns with sharenting aligns with some areas of sharenting research when people reflect on how sharenting can impact children.

Findings in Context

My findings contribute to the field of sharenting by examining how audiences contribute to sharenting and illustrating how members of the public respond to sharenting. There is a broad range of future research potential in this field, including audience research across academic disciplines, using different research methods, and focusing on different aspects of sharenting. Additional research is required on public discourse about sharenting, including how audiences express opinions across platforms and online communities. Other perspectives on these findings could relate to how audiences interact differently across platforms.

Advice to parents

I spoke with many friends, colleagues, and acquaintances throughout the duration of my sharenting research. Many people found this topic engaging and relatable, and on occasion people later told me that they had changed some of their practices as a result. One question has been sitting with me for some time, and I believe it needs to be addressed to a larger audience: *If I was a parent, what would I do?*

There is no simple solution to the issues surrounding sharenting. Mothers need support and feel immense social pressure to share about their children online as this continues to become entrenched into social practices. The vast majority of parents would be horrified to learn that images of their children have been taken from social media posts and used in inappropriate ways; however, this is a reality when it comes to images of children in the public domain. Anecdotal and research evidence suggest that this happens more often than people realise. I believe most parents are looking for a solution allowing them to protect the wellbeing of their children, while also expressing the experience of being a parent.

Regardless of how complicated sharenting is for parents, and especially for mothers, children need protection against the potential damages from sharenting. A parent's best intentions will not protect a child from bad agents.

After conducting this research, my plan when I become a parent is to use alternatives to mainstream social media and to avoid advertisements-based platforms such as Pinterest or subsidiaries of Meta. This could include secure photo-sharing platforms, texting, emailing, or printing images of a child.

If you would still like to use mainstream platforms like Instagram, consider your intentions, be careful with how much personal information is shared in each photo or caption, and consider how your child might feel about those images in the future. Reflect on the images

of yourself and your childhood that you would be comfortable having posted in the public

domain for your entire life and intentionally select the type of information you would like

published about your child. Just as Mark Twain's name was Samuel Clemens and Reese

Witherspoon's first name is Laura, there is no harm in protecting full names. Nobody owes the

internet their full name and birthdate; in fact, depending on your perspective, you may owe it to

your child to hold back from sharing that information.

Future Direction

I encountered a number of limitations in this research. This ranges from limitations

inherent in naturalistic inquiry and content analysis approaches, such as only having access to the

data provided from a naturally occurring environment. This study focused on two cases, one each

from Instagram and Reddit, and public responses to sharenting may vary across platforms.

Additionally, this research did not take intersectional identity factors into account since little was

known about commenter identities. This provides multiple additional opportunities for future

studies, ranging across methodologies, platforms, and cultures.

Future research is needed on how parents build their children's social media followings.

For example, during an environmental scan to find the Instagram account for my content

analysis, I encountered many accounts in children's names. These were managed by parents and

some of them featured young girls involved in performing arts such as dance and gymnastics.

These accounts often featured under-age girls in revealing clothes, sometimes revealing poses,

all posted within the public domain. For the sake of children's physical, emotional, and

psychological safety, further research should be done on who follows these accounts.

Additionally, other academic fields could contribute to a holistic understanding of sharenting.

For example, cognitive psychology research could examine methods for supporting young women whose parents pursued Instagram fame by sharing revealing images of them, since these young women could encounter challenges later in life as a result of their parents' oversharing. Legal research could examine restorative justice for children whose parents used their image to generate income without permission or consent, or who knowingly behaved in ways that could compromise their children's wellbeing on the path to becoming an influencer.

Conclusion

In the emergent field of sharenting, little is known about how the public responds to sharenting. Overall, this research sought to begin investigations on how audiences engage with sharenting across two cases: one on Instagram and one on Reddit, by researching the following question: *what are some ways that members of the public interact with sharenting and how does this relate to current sharenting research?* The findings of this research show that sharenting is both supported and opposed by the public, and that the public may not have the vocabulary to speak to this phenomenon because the word "sharenting" did not come up in the data from either case. This study provides a new angle for approaching sharenting research, with a focus on audience engagement and discourse. Studying the intersection between technology and society needs to include all of society, including audiences, to develop a holistic perspective of social phenomena.

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Appendix 1: Words excluded from Reddit word frequency

an about above after again against ago all also a man and any are aren't aren't as asshole assholes at be because been before being below between both but by can can't can't cannot could couldn't couldn't did didn't didn't do does doesn't doesn't doing don't don't down during each especially even extreme feel feelings feels few first for from further get getting had hadn't hadn't has hasn't hasn't have haven't haven't having he he'd he'll he's he'd he'll he's her here here's here's hers herself him himself his hoodie hoodies hoody how how's how's i i'd i'll i'm i've i'd i'll i'm i've if in into is isn't isn't it it's it's its itself kid kids let's let's like likely likeness liking make makes making me more most mustn't mustn't my myself never no nor not nta of off on once one only or other ought our ours ourselves out over own part partassipant said same say says see shall shan't shan't she she'd she'll she's she'd she'll she's should shouldn't shouldn't sister sisters so social some such take taking than that that's that's the their theirs them themselves then there there's there's these they they'd they'll they're they've they'd they'll they're they've thing things think this those through to too under until up upon us use used using very want wanted wanting wants was wasn't wasn't way ways we we'd we'll we're we've we'd we'll we're we've were weren't weren't what what's what's when when's when's where where's where's which while who who's who's whom whose why why's why's will with without won't won't would wouldn't wouldn't you you'd you'll you're you've you'd you'll you're you've your yours yourself yourselves